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Michael Gehler · Robert Rollinger
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The End of Empires

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The End of Empires

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This volume is dedicated to the memory of Bert G. Fragner (1941–2021), a great historian on empire and a special friend.

Preface

The editors´ common engagement in the "imperial turn" started when Robert Rollinger held a visiting professorship at the University of Hildesheim during the winter semester of 2006/07. During this time, Michael Gehler and Robert Rollinger have jointly developed the idea of putting a long-term project in imperial history into motion. In view of the upcoming anniversary of "1000 years of laying the foundation stone" of the early Romanesque cathedral-like church of St. Michael (1010) in Hildesheim, we organized a one-week conference on "Empires and Empires in World History" from 5 April to 1 May 2010 at the above mentioned historical site. This made it possible to take stock of the situation by analysing imperial case studies from Antiquity, the Middle Ages to Modern Times and Contemporary History in terms of real and reception history across epochs and comparative global history.[1]

Stimulated by the wealth of information of the 50 case studies of this conference, we decided to continue the project "History of Empires" with proven specialist colleagues as well as specific questions and further topics, while maintaining cross-epochal and increasingly intercontinental approaches.

Within the framework of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, we were able to hold a further multi-day conference in Vienna from 25 to 28 November 2015, which, with a view to forgotten empires, set out under the motto "Empires to be remembered" to find case studies that are not generally known, either in the public consciousness or among professional historians.[2]

A continuation project was found under "shooting star empires" ("Sternschnuppen-Imperien") so named by Robert Rollinger in the context of a conference in Blankenheim in the Eifel from 21 to 23 June 2017, which was dedicated to these phenomena of short-lived formations of great empires in historical overview under the motto of "Short-term Empires in World History".[3]

[1] The proceedings of this meeting have been published by Gehler and Rollinger (2014).

[2] The proceedings of this meeting have been published by Gehler and Rollinger (2021).

[3] The proceedings of this meeting have been published by Rollinger et al. (2020).

As a preliminary culmination of this long-term project, another conference lasting several days was held in Hildesheim from 2 to 6 October 2018 in cooperation with the Roemer-Pelizaeus-Museum (RPM). This conference analyzed the central question of what had caused the end of empires. Its motto was "Decline, Erosion and Implosion of Empires". The volume is now available. Further projects have already started[4] and further publications are about to follow.[5]

The last Hildesheim conference was funded by the Erasmus plus programme of the EU, Hildesheim's Erasmus partner university, the University of Innsbruck, the Institut für Vermögensentwicklung in Cologne, the Sparkasse Hildesheim-Goslar-Peine and the Universitätsgesellschaft Hildesheim. Our esteemed colleague and RPM director Regine Schulz as cooperation partner, Ms Löw from the Institute of History of the Foundation University of Hildesheim as well as Martin Dinh Chien Do and Nick Könnecke as student assistants have significantly contributed to the preparation and implementation of the conference. Our sincere thanks go to all of them.

Hildesheim, Germany — Michael Gehler
Innsbruck, Austria — Robert Rollinger
Vienna, Austria — Philipp Strobl
May 2021

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[4] In 2021 Robert Rollinger established a research unit ("Kommission") at the Austrian Academy of Sciences entitled "Transformationsprozesse und Imperium in den Antiken Welten Afro-Eurasiens" (Transformation processes and empire in the ancient worlds of Afro-Eurasia). In the same year he became chair of the NAWA project "From the Achaemenids to the Romans: Contextualizing empire and its longue-durée developments" hosted by the University of Wrocław, Poland, and funded by a grant PPN/PRO/2020/1/00009/U/00001of the NAWA Chair 2020 Programme and by a grant from the National Science Centre (Poland) 2021/01/1/HS3/00006. The project runs for four years (2021–2024).

[5] Fink and Rollinger (2021). Nickel and Rollinger (2022). Together with Kai Ruffing (Kassel), Michael Gehler and Robert Rollinger established the international series "Empires through the ages in global perspective" (de Gruyter)" the first volumes of which are forthcoming.

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Decline, Erosion, Implosion and Fall, or Just Transformation? Diverging Ends of Empires Through Time and Space

Michael Gehler, Robert Rollinger, and Philipp Strobl

1 General Observations

The articles of this comprehensive volume offer a multidisciplinary and—in fact—global approach to the history of empires, analyzing their ends over a long spectrum of humankind's history. As the main guiding question, every author of this volume asked for the reasons for the decline, the erosion, and the implosion of individual empires. All texts locate and highlight different factors that triggered or at least supported the ending or the implosion of empires. This overall question makes the very diverse texts comparable and allows to detect similarities, differences as well as inconsistencies of historical processes.

Since the contributions of this book examine a very long period of history and historical events that took place in different regions of the world as well as in different time periods, the empires analyzed here were obviously highly divergent in nature. This also implies that their declining processes were largely different. Some empires rose to power very quickly, based on rapid military successes, such as the Timurid, the Napoleonic, or the National Socialist Empire. As history shows, they were often unable to maintain their territorial

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gains, and in many cases—as we will see—their decline and their end followed soon. Many empires experienced what was described as an "imperial overstretch".[1] Some authors coined the term "empires in the making" for those short-lived political constructions unable to manage, stabilize, and sustain their quickly built imperial power structures. Other empires, contrarily, existed over a very long period of time. The Roman Empire, for example, lasted for centuries in various different forms. The phrase "Rome was not built in a day" could be also converted to describe its downfall. In fact, Rome also did not decline in one day. Its end was a rather complex, entangled process that spanned over several centuries.

Having this in mind, many authors of this volume opposed an all too quick and unmindful use of the term "decline". As Jürgen Paul shows, the Mongol Empire did not simply collapse, decline, or fall. It rather underwent a slow disintegration and fission process that spanned over four centuries and led to the formation of different successor empires. The Mughal Empire, as Stephan Popp indicates, on the other hand, experienced an unprecedented economic growth right at a time when historians usually would locate the empire's downfall. As we will see, historical sources, if available, in some cases do not support the use of such terminologies as "downfall" or "decline". Thus, the "decline and fall paradigm" is not without problems.[2] Some of the authors of this volume suggest alternative terms instead, such as "fission", "transition", "decentralization", "defragmentation", "disintegration", and/or "transformation" which are less vague and thus could be better suited for transnational, trans-empire, or global comparisons.

Obviously, the long observation period and the wide geographical framework of this book make it very difficult to compare the endings of the empires as described here in detail. There are more than 5000 years of human history and historical development between the end of the Sumerian Ur-III dynasty and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which, naturally, complicate any comparisons. The different case studies, however, do indeed allow us to recognize similarities as well as differences in historical developments and to detect some patterns of decay that repeat themselves in the long history of empires. By and large, the authors of this volume sketched out three different main factors for the downfall of empires:

1. Internal factors, such as the power or administrative structure of empires, succession regulations, or an overexploitation of internal resources;
2. External factors, such as the takeover by or the influence of foreign powers;
3. Unforeseen events, such as climate change, disasters or diseases.

Not very surprisingly, in most cases, analyzed here, the downfall of empires was not caused by only one single event or one single factor. It rather emerged from the interaction of many different factors playing together at the "right" time in history. To offer a brief example, as

[1] Florig (2010: 1103–1119).

[2] Morgan (2009: 427–437); Fink and Rollinger (2022).

Doris Kurella shows, the end of the South American Inca empire was not simply caused by a few hundred well equipped Spanish conquistadores who arrived in South America during the early sixteenth century and subsequently defeated millions of indigenous people on their own. In fact, the Inca empire was rather shaken and extremely weakened by civil wars, uprisings, and revolts, already before the first Spanish soldiers arrived. This internally caused weakening process, together with other factors, such as the rapid spread of European diseases, the Spanish alliance system, as well as their superior weaponry played together to put an end to the largest of the indigenous empires in South America.

In the following, we would like to highlight some of the most obvious and interesting observations concerning the end of empires from the reading of the different texts of this volume to give the reader an impression of the richness of research provided in this book.

To offer a few examples: very frequently, internal factors, such as wars of succession, or the systematic overexploitation of resources had weakened the power and strength of empires. During such times, an already beleaguered empire was frequently not able to defend itself against invading armies. In other cases, diseases or climate disasters weakened an empire or changed its economic structure or its agricultural output. This again led to a destabilized position and the inability of defending itself against invading armies.

By far the most important reasons for decay can be found in the empires' internal structures. High tax burdens and wars were the most frequent reasons for their decay to be mentioned in the following case studies. Empires in different periods and places in the world also frequently struggled to cope with resistance from within. Be it separation or independence movements, political parties, or certain groups of the population who demanded agency, voice, and influence, internal resistance was a crucial factor that affected the course of many empires in history. Some also struggled with their rapid growth: after a phase of fast expansion, they were unable to administer, control, or even pacify their territorial gains. Political entities such as the Napoleonic, or the Timurid empires, at some point in their histories, reached a state of imperial overstretch that made them ungovernable, which in some cases triggered their decline. Another interesting phenomenon, frequently mentioned in this book, is the failure of many political powers to firmly establish an empire during the very early stage of its empire building process. The Timurid, the Aztec, the Napoleonic Empire, or the *mare nostro-empire* of Benito Mussolini were such political constructs that did not manage to establish the imperial infrastructure or validation that allowed to secure a more permanent existence for their "empires in the making". Other empires such as those of Aksum or the early twentieth century Habsburg Empire were either largely or solely dependent on their allies or externally dominated trade structures and thus declined once the support was gone.

External influences such as invasions and military defeat were frequently the most visible ending points of empires. From the Hittite Kingdom, the Neo-Assyrian Empire, The Achaemenid Empire, the Sasanian Empire to the Habsburg Empire, many once powerful political entities ended after lost wars that sometimes resulted in a foreign invasion. What the contributions of this volume were able to show us is that a military

defeat frequently stood at the end of a complex declining or transformation process that had involved many more factors.

As the contributions of this volume indicate, unforeseen events such as diseases, climate change, or environmental disasters in some cases had profound effects on empires. In this context, we aim to refer to the quick Spanish conquest of the Inca and the Aztec Empires, the Arab takeover of the Sasanian Empire or the decline of the Chinese Tang Dynasty.

2 More Specific Observations

The papers of this conference offer an exceptional panorama of different perspectives on the history of empires through the ages. It is a global and transdisciplinary perspective that unites a wide range of interrelated historical disciplines focusing on and discussing the phenomenon of 'decline, erosion, and collapse of empires'.[3] Despite the broad range of different approaches of this volume, we will probably never be able to define the one and only definite cause of why empires decline, erode, and collapse. The problem is as fascinating and challenging as it is tricky and complex.[4] Nevertheless, reviewing the chapters of this volume allows more general observations which can be regarded as relevant for empires in world history:

1. It is a truism but an important fact that our view on the disintegration of empires is guided by available sources and the traditions of how to evaluate them. These are also traditions of different disciplines and thus different approaches. There is a huge difference in reconstructing the downfall of a specific empire based on already existant narrative sources or by evaluating administrative, archaeological, and non-narrative written evidence. Established interpretations are very difficult to overcome, especially when they are regarded to be 'plausible' or 'reasonable' and embedded into a worldview which is shared by the historical observer. Moreover, narrative sources clearly are biased by the over-evaluating political history and the agency of single historical agents. However, as the various contributions of this volume demonstrate, the end of an empire is by no way a clear cut and easily tangible historical event but a complex process that can be studied and examined by a variety of diverging angles. There are social and economic aspects to be observed as well as a further wide range of factors such as technical developments, communication strategies, and the deployment of soft power. These aspects are not necessarily visible at the same time and they may not correlate with political events. This is important since these observations are relevant for the

[3] The end of empire was always a favorite issue of historiography. See e.g. Turchin (2003); Drompp (2005); Fischer-Bovet (2015); Fowles (2016); Yaycioglu (2016); Middleton (2017c); Yıldız (2017); Eisenberg (2018); Diamond (2006); Diamond (2019); Clayton (2020); Lavan (2020); Rezakhani (2020).

[4] Hall (2021).

definition of our general perspectives on empires and—directly related to this—to historical eras and the question of how we conceptualize history and divide (and share) it between our different disciplines.

2. Having a closer look at the history of empires immediately reveals a central problem. This problem is again one of perspective and conceptualization. Generally, we are used to construct empires like human beings. Through this lens, empires experience all stages of human life. They face birth and youth, growth and standstill, aging and change, decline and death. Such ideas could even generate a cyclic view of history.[5] Moreover, historians are usually convinced to be able to grasp and define these stages and to connect them with political events and historical agency. However, such a well-established approach might create an illusion and false picture. It is not by chance that such a perspective often correlates with a tendency to rate political history higher than economic and social structures and social and economic longue-durée developments. Modern scholarship has learned to critically evaluate such traditional concepts as the ever-flourishing approach of "long centuries" reveals and the inspiring idea of "transformations" demonstrates.[6] This is also true for many empires under review in this volume whose ends are often much more difficult to determine than a first look might suggest.
3. Historians are more and more in favor of visualizing history as an amalgam of dynamic and multi-layered processes, which are, at its best, only partly controlled by historical agents. This perspective has fundamental consequences for the central question of the various contributions of this volume. It is hardly a single and decisive event that triggers an empire's end, but rather a series of events framed by specific historical circumstances. This fundamental insight immediately touches the terminology applied by historians to describe what they extract from their sources. Terms like "downfall" and "collapse" suggest a single event whereas "decline" and "erosion" refer to longer processes. Thus, on the one side, terminological awareness is important but, on the other side, it is naïve to believe that we are able to coin the developments and processes connected with an empire's disappearance by the introduction of a new terminology immediately solving all our problems. This is not to deny that innovative terms have high potential to rethink, reconsider, and reevaluate historical events but they are not a general remedy for our inherent misunderstandings. It is still the most noble task of any historian to strive for a most accurate description in dialogue with the available sources. This description has to find a balance between specific and general aspects, between singularity and the modes of comparison, that foster historical progress and deeper insights.

[5] Cf. e.g. Turchin and Nefedov (2009).

[6] See e.g. Meier (2012); Cimadomo et al. (2020); Middleton (2020); Ford (2020); Bachmann et al. (2021); Curta (2021).

4. Since this volume intends to develop a comparative view within a global framework, it inherently considers comparison as an essential tool for any historical undertaking. This also implies the belief that "empire" is a specific historic entity with common traits and characteristics that can be observed and described through the ages and around the globe.[7] However, such a stance should not be confused with a simplistic denial of differences and singularities,[8] specific developments and exceptional circumstances. Fruitful comparison has to emerge from a serious dialogue between the local sources and an awareness what these sources are able to tell us and what they keep secret. This has nothing to do with the absolute number of sources available but with their background, their "Sitz im Leben", their perspective and intention, and, last but not least, the multifarious questions addressed to them by the modern historian. It is within such a methodological framework where comparison gains momentum and where a wider and a narrower perspective are able to mutually enrich each other.
5. Nearly all the contributions of this volume describe the end of a given empire as a very specific process triggered and driven by an accumulation of a series of different factors.[9] Not a single contribution considers a monocausal explanation to be satisfactory for any empire's end. It is neither an external enemy, climate, ideology, economy, technology, geography, social structure, or religion but always a combination of these elements that suddenly matter and steer change.[10] But these factors have also to be seen in a larger framework beyond the question of end and downfall of any empire. Empires always face challenges from all different directions. The popular view of an "Augustan threshold", which any empire has to face once and only to be successful is a very simplistic view and is thus not properly suited to explain the dynamic challenges a successful empire has to deal with through its existence.[11] It is even disputable whether short-term empires, which do not last for more than 100 years, are more the rule than the exception.[12] It is of great interest, however, when and why the accumulation of

[7] Cf. e.g. Parker (2018); Stek and Düring (2018).

[8] Cf. e.g. Inglebert (2020).

[9] A good example for such an approach is recently Jakob (2017).

[10] In recent years there is a clear-cut tendency in historiography to highlight monocausal explanations like climate and disease. See e. g. Wiener (2014); Campbell (2016); Kaniewski and Van Campo (2017); Weiss (2017a); Weiss (2017b); Middleton (2017a); Middleton (2017b); Sinha et al. (2019); Chase et al. (2020); Preiser-Kapeller (2018, 2021); Especially Harper (2017) created general awareness for this approach in popular media and newspapers; Cf. the critical voices by Haldon et al. (2018a–c); Bresson (2020); Huebner (2020); Rankin et al. (2021); For empires changing and manipulating the environment see Morrison (2018).

[11] What Strootman (2021: 12), holds for the Seleucid empire holds true for many empires in world history: "... the Seleukid Empire was able to 'breathe': it did not follow a straightforward trajectory of rise, decline and fall, but instead expanded and contracted several times during its c. 240-year existence."; Cf. also Rollinger (2022).

[12] Cf. Rollinger et al. (2020).

challenging elements is about to reach a level that generates a process of crisis and erosion.[13] Furthermore, this complex concentration of challenging elements at a specific time is only one side of the coin. The ability to successfully face a certain number of challenges is a central element for an empire's success. It has been argued with good reason that a focus on an empire's resilience and capability to overcome any challenge is essential to a better understanding of its downfall or survival.[14] We, however, also know that empires that "survived" were "strong" and those who disappeared were "weak". Consequently, it makes sense to have a close look at the individual circumstances and specific frameworks that guide these processes of change. In some cases, historical analysis requires traditional modes of explanation like highlighting the importance of individual agents or resorting to abstract concepts like historic contingency to make sense of historic dynamics *post festum*, but, in general, it is an extraordinary combination of multifarious factors that end or transform empires.

6. The question of "end" versus "transformation" is not always easy to answer. This conundrum becomes evident when we take into account how much scholarly perspective matters. A change of perspective affects the perception of 'historical realities'. Focusing less on specific events but more on structures and exploring the interrelations and dynamics between a certain period of time before and after a given empire's collapse can be a revealing exercise.

Some chapters in this volume successfully develop such new perspectives, others argue for the need of a change in perspective. It is already of utmost interest to realize that "downfall" and "end" do not necessarily have to be absolute facts but are dependent upon perspective and viewpoint. Such an assessment is related to what any historian regards to be "weighty" and "momentous" in order to grasp and describe appropriately any empire and the question of its survival. Four elements appear to loom exceptionally large in the context of possible transformation processes:

Firstly, empires are generally projects fostered and boosted by alliances of regional and trans-regional elites. If networks among elites survive in substantial manner, even in a different political framework, they guarantee a certain degree of continuity within a changing paradigm triggering transformation processes.[15]

Secondly, empires are deeply embedded in given worldviews that are developed in dialogue between imperial centers on the one hand and the imperial and local elites on the other hand. This worldview has to be convincing and it has to demonstrate successfully its ability to explain historical orders, processes, and changes. This is of special importance since the power of any empire is limited, although it is eager to demonstrate the contrary.

[13] Cf. Fink and Rollinger (2022).

[14] See Schwartz and Nichols (2010); Faulseit (2016); Haldon (2016); Lentz et al. (2018); Haldon et al. (2020a, b); Vidal-Cordasco and Nuevo-López (2021).

[15] Cf. e.g., Drompp (2018: 314–315).

Counter-narrative and ideological resistance are considerable means to challenge any empire's strength.[16] As an ideology any imperial worldview has legitimizing strength, as a religion it broadcasts and mediates sense, as a soft power it generates acceptance. It is not a rigid concept but, within a certain framework, flexible and dynamic, adaptable and adoptable. In an absolute manner, downfall and end of any given empire only take place if this worldview completely disappears or vanishes. As it appears in many cases, the concept of transformation describes much more precisely historical change than the traditional idea of downfall and end.[17]

Thirdly, the need to convince has not only an internal but also an external dimension. It is not only directed toward the local and transregional imperial elites but also towards the outside world of vassals, followers, sympathizers and enemies. It is directly related to any empire's capability and desire to intervene beyond the areas of direct control. Although this intervention needs a military backbone,[18] it is by no means bound to campaigning and waging war. Since empires generate threat and fear but also admiration and attraction, it is the soft power of the propagated worldview that bears responsibility for an empire's success outside its immediate area of control. This is of special importance when history faces competing empires which are not only confronting each other on the battlefield. Any empire's worldview has not only a religious dimension playing with the forces of divine command and heavenly providence but tries to make use of this ideology to threaten on the one side and to plead for the advantages of cooperation on the other side. If the gap between ideological claim and historical 'reality' becomes too large, the empire gets lost of its mission statement and its imperial reach starts to decline, which implies a situation of serious imperial crises. Without convincing soft power, empires can hardly overcome the challenges they have to face at different times.

Fourthly, success and the power of conviction are bound to performance. This is related to the imperial and local elites in general but especially to the representative center, i.e. the monarch, president, chancellor, or emperor. The ruler's performance is a stabilizing element of extraordinary importance. It is directly connected to the related worldview and its strength to convince or to disappoint. If, at this point, the ruler's performance is in considerable disaccord with any empire's soft power, centrifugal dynamics gain momentum that decrease the empire's ability to successfully deal with any external and internal threatening.[19]

[16] See Esders (2009); Yoffee (2016); Andrade (2020); Morlet (2020); Price (2020); Roux (2020); Schwartz (2020); Wilfand (2020); Woolf (2020).

[17] Cf. Hell (2019); Russo (2020); Sharon (2020).

[18] See Roger (2018).

[19] A well-known example for such an event generating a negative dynamic is the sack of Rome in 410 AD; See Lipps et al. (2013).

3 Summaries

In the following, we will provide expanded summaries of each contribution. This concentrated overview will give the reader first insights in structure and content of the volume. The summaries are organized along specific periods and are presented in the same order as they appear in the book.

3.1 Antiquity

The End of the Mesopotamian 'Empire' of Akkad[20]

Hans Neumann's contribution analyzes one of the earliest empires in world history that had flourished for about 180 years during the third millennium BCE. Akkad's success was mainly built upon its military capacities. A series of internal and external factors can be held responsible for the empire's decade-long decay and subsequent breakdown. For Neumann, the Akkadians were never really capable of establishing a firm centralized administrative basis for their empire. This led to increasing and long-lasting tensions between the ruling elites of Akkad and its subordinated cities in Mesopotamia, which caused regular military uprisings.

The Akkad Empire undertook intense and costly efforts to pacify the Southern Mesopotamian provinces. Wars and skirmishes absorbed many resources, thus weakening the central power. However, in the end, its ruling elites never really managed to sustainably overcome the dichotomy between the central power of Akkad and the elites of the southern Mesopotamian provinces.

Internally, regularly occurring revolts additionally weakened the central power. The last 50 years of the Akkad state constituted the empire's actual breakdown phase. A combination of internal rivalries and palace revolts that led to quickly changing rulers as well as the threat of growing South-Mesopotamian independence movements considerably weakened the imperial project. At the same time, external invaders, such as pastoral nomads and the so-called Gutians originating from the Zagros mountains took advantage of the weakened Akkadian military capacities for their incursions and invasions. Around the year 2100 BCE, the Akkadian rulers seemed to have lost control of their state.

A mixture of domestic and foreign policy elements led to Akkad's disintegration, which involved decades of unrest. One of the reasons for this was a conflict of the elites of Akkad and its provinces. The lack of a strong center reinforced the antagonisms and stimulated resistance in provincial towns. Wars devoured resources and weakened the empire. At the same time, external invaders took advantage of the reduced capacities of the Akkadians and accelerated the decline of the empire.

[20] Original title: Der Zusammenbruch des mesopotamischen Staates von Akkade.

The Decline of the Ur III Dynasty: The End of an Empire and Its Afterlife in the Collective Memory of Mesopotamian Societies

Martin Lang draws the reader's attention to another empire with its core area in Mesopotamia. He explores the last episode of Sumerian history at the end of the 3rd millennium BCE, when the expanding city-state of Ur in southern Babylonia managed to establish an empire of supra-regional importance, the so-called Ur-III Dynasty. Lang describes the end of this empire as a two-decades-lasting phase of erosion and transformation that did not lead to "burned earth" and destruction, but rather to a "certain continuity" in the subsequent reign of the succeeding Isin dynasty, which based its legitimation on the infrastructure build by the kings of the third dynasty of Ur.

The end of the empire can be explained according to Lang by its splendid, unidirectional dealing with resources that triggered an endless stream of sacrifices and subsidies to a few favored cities and, in turn, did not provide a reciprocal flow of central support to the provincial ration or allotment system. This made the system vulnerable on the long turn and caused dissatisfaction in the less central parts of the empire. After 20 years of extracting its provinces, the Ur III empire was finally ended by a militant revolt of a military leader in the provincial city of Isin. The loss of provinces and the subsequent abruption of the stream of resources into the empire's heart must have sustainably weakened the Ur-III imperial system and led to an empire of "cachexia" (a medical term meaning anemia with symptoms of weakness, combined with a severe loss of strength as a side effect of a serious illness). The Ur III state was a short-term empire that lived to a large degree from resources extracted from its subordinated territories. Although this strategy led to a fast rise of the empire, it was also responsible for its gradual decline, since the Ur III kings did not manage to pacify and satisfy their provinces. Sooner or later resistance grew and the takeover of a military leader in one of its provincial cities caused the final blow to the imperial system.

The end of the Ur III empire had to do very centrally with the unresolved issue of resources. While some cities were privileged, the provinces felt disadvantaged, especially as there were significant problems in the allocation system, which exacerbated social inequalities, caused displeasure and unrest. The tension between the center and the periphery should prove to be one of the central problems. After decades of exploitation of the provinces, the Ur-III state was ravaged by violent uprisings, which made the peripheral city of Isin particularly prominent. The revolt of a number of provinces and the subsequent interruption of the resource allocation in the center weakened the empire. Ur-III was no longer durable because it relied on the resources of subordinate territories, which increasingly refused. Since the state did not succeed in pacifying the relationship with the provinces, the periphery struck back a fatal blow. The interruption in the delivery of goods hit the core of the central system, which lived for the most part on resources that came from the peripheral regions. Thus, the Ur III state experienced erosion and transformation that finally led to the emergence of the subsequent Isin dynasty, which was able to base its rule and infrastructure on the kings of UR III.

The Collapse of the Hittite Kingdom

Stefan de Martino analyzes the collapse of the Hittite Kingdom in the second decade of the twelfth century BCE. His analysis is a particularly challenging task, since there are no original Hittite sources describing the end of the empire. De Martino spots a series of different factors that support the fall of the Hittite Kingdom. The basis for the observation that the Hittite-empire collapsed is the fact that the Hittite capital of Hattusa was abandoned and that the official administrative buildings were cleared out during the early twelfth century BCE. This led to the collapse of the Hittite system of central governance and the subsequent formation of several smaller political entities on the empire's former territory.

Concerning the abandonment of Hattusa, De Martino reconstructs two possible but different scenarios. On the one hand, the Hittite king Suppiluliuma II or one of his heirs abandoned the city and established a new capital city elsewhere, on the other hand, the abandonment of the residence may be explained by a possible takeover by external rulers who split up the empire and took the records and treasures of the Hittite administration with them.

De Martino discusses a series of external and internal factors that can be held responsible for the decline of the Hittite Empire. Shortages of resources (food, raw material, and labor) created a situation of crisis: Over the years, the Hittite Kingdom's high demand of raw materials has led to a "continual and cumulative overstressing of the Anatolian environment." The early twelfth century BCE brought additional shortages in the urgently needed labor supply due to epidemics, diseases, and war. Research also detected some changes in the environment due to the emergence of a more arid climate in Anatolia, which seriously affected the food supply.

The reduced ability of securing the empire's supply in resources weakened its military power. As De Martino shows, during the twelfth century BCE the Hittite rulers were no longer able to protect their subordinated polities. This further affected the loyalty of their satellite states and vassals and consequently weakened their range of power. At the same time, internal power struggles further deteriorated the position of the Hittite elites and inflicted the authority of the Hittite royal house. All these factors coincided with the appearance of an external threat, in the form of the so-called Sea Peoples whose mass migration into Anatolia contributed to the destabilization of the region. To sum up, the decline of the Hittite Empire can be seen as a disintegration and weakening process consisting of internal factors (such as the overstretching of resources and internal rivalries) and external factors (such as climate change, wars, and diseases), that finally led to the dissolution of the empire and its subsequent splitting into several different dominions on its former territory.

Thus, the end of the Hittite Kingdom can only be explained by a multifactor analysis. With the abandonment of the power center of Hattusa and the resulting loss of bureaucratic networks, the system faced a serious crisis accelerated by internal and external reasons. The lack of mobilization, coupled with the increased need for resources, presented an insoluble dilemma for Hittite rule. The shortage of labor was not only caused by epidemics, but also

by climate change. The Hittite Empire was no longer able to feed its own population, which led to a weakening of its defensive capability and aroused the covetousness of aggressors. As a result, the Hittite rulers could neither hold the empire together nor prevent internal power struggles and ensure the consent of its inhabitants. This mixture of factors accelerated the process of disintegration with the emergence of new and smaller units of rule.

The End of New Kingdom Egypt

In his article Henning Franzmeier deals with the decline of Egypt's New Kingdom. Its collapse has been described as the end of an era of stability that lasted for more than 400 years. The end of the New Kingdom coincided with several crucial changes such as territorial losses and the partial division of the country and foreign interventions. The region further experienced social and religious changes and suffered from tomb robberies as well as an overall economic downturn and shortages of raw material and food supply.

According to Franzmeier, the decline of Egypt's New Kingdom can only be understood as a long-lasting process stretching over more than one and a half centuries. There was no specific event that caused the ending of this empire, quite the contrary, a series of external and internal factors were responsible for its slow and gradual decline. Franzmeier locates the beginning of this process in a succession crisis that destabilized the empire. An unexpected climate change was another factor that triggered the empire's downfall, since it caused a mass influx by neighboring tribes such as the Libyans or the so-called Sea Peoples. During the following decades, the Egyptian kings were forced to spend considerable resources in battling these invaders, however, in many cases did not succeed and had to accept the resettlement of their enemies on their territory.

Weakened by succession crises and a quickly changing sequence of rulers, the military elites of the invading Libyan tribes gradually took over power of the most influential positions in the empire. This led to decentralization and the empire's fragmentation and reduced the importance of the sacred institution of kingship as a central facility of the empire. The final blow to the weakened empire came in 1070 BCE when Libyan elites, who were already in the country, finally took over the kingship.

Thus, the decline of the New Kingdom of Egypt was a longer process after centuries of stability, reflecting its continued strength and reserves. Internal crises caused by disputed succession arrangements and external interventions, as well as a deterioration of the economic situation, contributed to a change in the balance of power. Climate change was an additional negative factor that contributed to the decline, provoking a mass influx of foreign and neighboring peoples. The lack of mobilization of resources to ward off these threats led to the settlement of the opponents, who in turn asserted claims to power. The decentralization and fragmentation of the territory additionally triggered a gradual loss of the king's status as a divine individual. The Libyans, who in the meantime had settled down in the Delta region, took over the rule and ended the New Kingdom around 1070 BCE.

The End of the Neo-Assyrian Empire

Simonetta Ponchia examines the path towards the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in 612/609 BC. Contemporary sources offer only a fragmented picture of the process—thus many questions about its downfall remain unanswered. Ponchia tries to demonstrate that the empire's downfall was caused by a combination of different reasons and did not happen because of one single cause. A series of external long-term factors, such as climate changes and wars, as well as internal factors such as the excessive exploitation of the Assyrian provinces, as well as two centuries-long rivalries within the royal family and power struggles fundamentally destabilized the empire and led to disintegration and the defection of former dependent tribes. The Medes who once had provided troops for the Assyrian army started to revolt against their former rulers, thus substantially weakening the empire's power. This, together with an attack of the Babylonian armies, brought the final destruction and dismantling of the administrative centers of the Assyrian Empire. Its end was again caused by a combination of different factors. Long-term exogenous reasons like climate changes and wars, as well as endogenous factors such as the excessive exploitation of the Assyrian provinces as well as rivalries within the royal family destabilized the empire and led to its collapse.

The "End" of the Achaemenid-Persian Empire: Caesura and Transformation in Dialogue

In their contribution "The 'End' of the Achaemenid-Persian Empire: Caesura and Transformation in Dialogue" Robert Rollinger and Julian Degen discuss the end of one of the largest empires in world history. The authors question the still prevalent view in modern scholarship that considers the last century of the empire's existence as a period of ongoing weakness. However, such a perspective, which straightaway interprets the empire as an easy target for Alexander's conquest plans is and always was imbued by a biased Eurocentric approach hailing "western superiority". This is also related to another "grand narrative" that takes the end of the last ancient Near Eastern empire and Alexander's conquest as deep ruptures heralding a new epoch in which "Asia" and the former subjects of the Great King became "hellenized". In contrast to such a perspective, this chapter presents arguments to view the last century of the Achaemenid Empire less as a period of weakness than as decades of powerful resilience against inner and outer enemies. Focusing on the empire's and the imperial elites' resilience allows highlighting the various strategies of Alexander legitimizing his rule towards Asian contexts. Contextualizing the Macedonian campaign against this backdrop shows that Alexander not only developed his plans to conquer Asia in its totality only step by step but also highlights how much he was pressed to find an appropriate response to the ongoing resistance of the Iranian elites. The authors argue for a reassessment of Achaemenid imperial power throughout a long fourth c. BCE. Such a view challenges the established narrative of the Achaemenid Empire as having died its own death and thus having become a vulnerable subject of conquest. The same applies to the alleged rupture of Eurasian history by Hellenism. The imperial atmosphere which

Cyrus II had created was maintained by Alexander and even survived the fragmentation by his successors.

Thus, what brought the collapse of the Achaemenid empire is best explained by a Janus-faced 'model of extinction and transformation', achieved by a determined opponent who was able and willing to accept high costs to vanquish the empire in many years of ongoing brutal fighting. At the very same time, he eagerly copied and transformed imperial structures to save his conquest. Obviously, he was much more successful with the first than with the later as events after Alexander's early death immediately demonstrate. What had been kept alive successfully for more than 200 years by the Achaemenids was actually destroyed within a little period of more than 10 years when the main rump of the former Achaemenid Empire crumbled.

The End of the Roman Empire: Civil Wars, the Imperial Monarchy, and the End of Antiquity

Henning Börm's article is dedicated to the end of the Roman Empires and seeks explanations and new interpretations for the temporally different declines of the Western and the Eastern Roman Empire. As Börm mentions, there is hardly any other empire, whose story is so frequently told from its ending. This results in the problematic situation that "old notions of flowering, ascend and decadence are still very powerful here", as he argues. According to Börm, there were many different factors that led to the decline of both Roman Empires. Börm's principal considerations evolve around the question whether internal or external developments can be held responsible for the decay of the Western Roman Empire during the fifth century and the resilience of the Eastern (Byzantine) Roman Empire from the seventh century onwards.

For centuries, the Roman Empire was a powerful force that was "superior to all of its neighbors". As Börm further states, there was no external power that "would have been able to conquer the Roman Empire with its vast resources" and its tightly organized infrastructure. Consequently, internal factors must have been crucial in bringing the western empire down. Börm regards the structural instability of the Roman monarchy as the main reason that triggered a long disintegration process: As early as the third century, civil wars and internal power struggles had begun to weaken the empire's defense capacities, which had even led to the division of the country into three and later two 'empires'. Among the main problems within this weakening process, was the growing use of foreign auxiliary troops and warlords to support the Roman armies during the periods of civil wars. Subsequently, these "mercenaries" took over a growing pool of tasks from the regular army, thereby more and more replacing it. During the fifth century, finally, the Roman army was substantially weakened and unable to guarantee the promised peace within the whole empire ("Pax Augusta"). From then on, Germanic warlords and warrior groups—most of them had been invited into the empire to replace the regular army—dethroned the last Western Roman emperor and overtook the Western Roman territory, leading to the empire's defragmentation.

There were several reasons for the decline of the Imperium Romanum, although internal factors were considered to be essential. The increasing deployment of foreign troops, warlords, and mercenaries to assist the Roman armies during the civil wars was a serious problem, as the Western Roman emperors became increasingly dependent on them, while the Eastern Roman Empire was able to hold on and remain defensible at least until the early seventh century. This can mainly be explained with its strong center Constantinople and the rich oriental provinces that provided the empire with the resources necessary to maintain an army, powerful enough to protect its borders. From the seventh century on, however, the eastern empire faced several waves of attacks by neighboring forces (Persians and Arabs). For reasons "as yet unclear", as Börm writes, the Eastern Roman emperors were unable to defend their provinces against the intruders and subsequently lost the economically most important eastern provinces. This loss of territory and resources substantially weakened the Eastern Roman empire and constituted the beginning of a slow decay process that ended with the Ottomans' conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

The End of the Parthian Arsacid Empire

The same problem arises for the Parthian Arsacid rule whose end is analyzed by M. Rahim Shayegan. Only very few sources are available that shed light on the end of Arsacid rule. As far as we know from the sources, there was no sudden collapse caused by devastating wars or natural disasters. Based on the fact that the successor dynasty of the Sasanians was quickly and widely accepted among the Arsacid elites, Shayegan suggests to regard the end of the Arsacid empire as a mere dynastic shift within the imperial expanse that allowed for a quick and smooth absorption of the Parthian elites into the Sasanian aristocracy. According to the author, it was not an abrupt implosion or sudden collapse, but rather a transformation by the establishment of a new dynasty. A transformed and larger context of empire led to a silent and non-violent absorption of previous local rulers into the new Sasanian power structure.

The End of Ērānšahar: The Decline of the Sasanian Empire

Touraj Daryaee delves deep into the history of the Sasanian Empire, particularly investigating its three-decade-long fall during the seventh century. He sees external factors as the main reasons for the empire's downfall. The invading Arab armies, as research has shown, were better organized and trained than the Iranian forces. This fact can finally be held responsible for the Arab victory over the Sasanian empire. At the same time, as archaeological records indicate, the Sasanian empire was ravaged by environmental disasters and infectious diseases such as the bubonic plague, leading to a loss of manpower and stability as well as to economic decline, which also eased the conquest of the empire. As Daryaee further describes, the last years of the Sasanian Empire brought internal power struggles and the establishment of several different kings who ruled over different parts of the empire at the same time, which led to fragmentation and military weakening. The final blow to the Sasanian empire came during the mid-seventh century, when Arab troops managed to firstly conquer Mesopotamia as well as the Persian heartland.

An internal decay expressed by wars of succession and power struggles had weakened the Sasanian empire during the first half of the seventh century. The final and actual trigger for the downfall, however, came through external factors: Diseases, environmental disasters, and, last but not least, the invasion of a military powerful neighbor were the main reasons, that according to Daryaee triggered the decline of the Sasanian empire.

The End of the Kushan Empire

Josef Wiesehöfer and Kai Ruffing discuss the end of the Kushan Empire that flourished during the second and third century CE in the Middle East and India, as an open research question. As the authors clarify, it is impossible to determine the exact reasons for the empire's decline due to a striking lack of sources. There are no written, contemporary records and researchers who are interested in the empire mainly have to rely upon numismatic evidence. However, the Kushan empire whose economic success was based on mining, trade, and the demand of its cities declined during the fourth century BC. Wiesehöfer and Ruffing offer different explanations for this process. External invading forces could have been active during this time. There were rivalries and military conflicts with the neighboring empires of the Sasanians and the Guptas who expanded from the West and South into the Kushan core regions. This led to territorial losses and a decline of the empire's infra-structure. Revenues from agricultural and urban contexts were lost, so were profits from regional and supra regional trade. The economic setbacks may also have intensified the tensions within the dynasty.

The contribution by Wiesehöfer and Ruffing is an example of the immense challenges of interpretation when the sources are extremely sparse. As the main reasons for the end of the Kushan empire, the two authors assume foreign invaders, rivalries with neighboring peoples who attacked from the West, and restricted trade with other economic areas.

3.2 Islam and Muslim World

From Universalism to Regionalism. The Question of the Break-Up of the Abbasid Empire Revisited

In his first contribution to the volume Lutz Berger focuses on the disintegration of the Abbasid Caliphate. He highlights that the change from Umayyad to Abbasid rule was not a change of empire but a change of governance with the introduction of a new imperial elite whose power and influence rested on the Khorassani army. Berger analyses the decline of the Abbasid Empire as a process of about 100 years that started at the middle of the ninth century. It was neither instigated by foreign opponents nor by imperial overstretch but by deterioration of the economic basis of the caliphate. The crucial event was the Zanj rebellion of African slaves in southern Iraq in the second half of the ninth century which dramatically affected the yields of the richest agrarian region of the empire and the center's ability to attract the imperial elites to the court by satisfying their ambitions and fostering their careers. At the same time, the caliphate more and more lost its religious charisma

whereas the elites started to concentrate and develop their careers along provincial and local levels. This way, the empire slowly got rid of its imperial elites, who forfeited their transregional social cohesion (*asabiyya*). It was only this growing internal weakness that allowed foreign powers like the Byzantines and the Ghuzz Turks to advance and celebrate success at the deteriorating empire's cost.

The End of the Mongol Empire

Provocatively, Jürgen Paul questions whether there was a "decline or fall" of the Mongol Empire at all. He opts for avoiding the "decline and fall paradigm", since such developments are hard to be verified by our historical sources. "Decline" as he describes, can be seen as a rather vague metaphor, which "does not lend itself easily to interstate or inter empire comparisons". Instead of "decline and fall", Paul deploys the term "fission" to describe those transformation and transition processes that stand at the end of the history of specific empires. He shows that there were no important external factors leading to the end of the Mongol Empire. There were no environmental catastrophes or major invasions by its enemies that led to the fragmentation of the Mongol empire during the second half of the thirteenth century. The empire underwent a slow disintegration and fragmentation process instead, resulting in the formation of several smaller "successor-empires" on its former territory from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century. Paul describes this process as inevitable. As the main reason, he mentions the sheer size of the Mongol Empire as well as its incapacity to deal with internal problems "which boiled down to the inability to prevent fission". For Paul, the empire was simply unable to administer its enormous area from one single power center. These administrative difficulties combined with the Mongol practice of providing the members of the royal family with appanages can be seen as the main reasons for the internally caused defragmentation.

The End of the Timurid Empire

Bert G. Fragner (†) examines the fall of the short-term Timurid Empire in Central Asia during the fourteenth century. According to him, it is only possible to describe Timurid rule as empire in the years between 1370 and 1405. During that time, Amir Timur formed a political entity that managed to control vast areas in Central Asia. Timur's death however, occurred when the Timurids had not yet been able to firmly establish their position of power. His death thus initiated a 10-year period of wars of succession between his heirs. These wars considerably weakened the empire and led to a loss of more than 50% of its former territory. When Timur's son Shah-Rukh finally succeeded in the struggles against his competitors, the Empire was defragmented and not able to restore its former position. This led to an ongoing defragmentation process. Continuous defensive struggles against neighboring opponents and political entities such as the *Golden Horde* permanently overstretched the Timurids' resources and led to the final collapse of the empire.

The short-lived Timurid Empire was too strongly oriented towards the decisive figure of one individual ruler. After his death, battles for succession broke out. These wars were decisive for the weakening and territorial losses. Shah-Rukh was no longer able to

reestablish the empire, which led to further imperial disintegration and post-imperial fragmentation. Due to the empire's inability to mobilize resources, the Timurids were unable to keep their empire alive.

3.3 Africa, Asia, China

The Decline and Collapse of the Kingdom of Aksum (6th–7th CE): An Environmental Disaster or the End of a Political Process?

Gianfrancesco Lusini analyzes the eastern African Kingdom of Aksum that grew into an influential regional power stretching throughout the highlands of Eritrea and Tigray between the third and the sixth century CE. As Lusini shows, there are many different explanations of the decline and ultimate ending of this empire, ranging from environmental change to the outbreak of diseases brought into the country by foreign invaders. Lusini highlights that there is no evidence for a military clash that could have caused a rapid fall of the empire. The decline of the kingdom of Aksum rather has to be found in its internal organization and its entanglement with regional trade structures. The kingdom and its infrastructure largely depended on revenues from the Red Sea trade. According to Lusini, the end of the empire resulted from its inability to cope with changes in the direction and nature of regional trade routes. As soon as financial revenues from the Red Sea began to decrease, the empire was no longer able to maintain its social and economic infrastructure. This led to a considerable weakening of its elites and the neglect of infrastructure, resulting in an economic, social, and political crisis that caused the ultimate end of the state. Aksum probably perished due to internal structural deficits and a lack of independence from the regional economic framework. The deficits in trade led to financial losses, making the internal socio-economic system unsustainable. As a result, the political elites suffered considerable losses of political loyalty and legitimacy on the part of the population, which consequently provoked a systemic crisis that sealed the end of this East African empire.

What Role Did Climate Change Play in the Decline of the Tang Dynasty?

The decline of the Chinese Tang Dynasty is subject to the paper by Hans van Ess. In his contribution, he questions traditional views of the Tang dynasty ascribing its decline mainly to internal factors such as a financial collapse that caused social unrest, uprisings, and revolts: during the ninth century, the Tang introduced extraordinarily high taxes to finance their military and to buy the loyalty of local military leaders. This obvious overstretch of their financial possibilities considerably weakened the Tang rulers' position and ultimately supported the dynasty's decline.

Drawing on historical sets of climate data, van Ess tries to point out that climate change may have been a major factor in the decline of the Tang Empire, causing decades of drought that posed various challenges to the empire's administration and ultimately led to a scarcity of resources that weakened the Tang ruling classes. To support his ideas, van Ess

refers to the fact that the ascent of the empire correlated with the rise of average temperatures in the region, whereas decreasing temperatures went hand in hand with its decline. This contributed to a shortage of resources and overburdened the administration, which tried to overcome this challenge by raising taxes, leading to uprisings and disempowerment of the last emperor. Consequently, overstretching the tax burden caused riots that were directly responsible for the dethroning of the last Tang emperor around 900 CE.

Thoughts About the Decentralization of the Mughal Empire

Stephan Popp deals with the decline of the Indian Mughal Empire during the eighteenth century. He starts by questioning the concept of "decline" with respect to the Mughal Empire's history. According to him, there was a rather marked decentralization and defragmentation process that weakened the Empire's central power, while, at the same time, parts of the empire experienced a "fantastic economic growth", as he writes. Whether or not we can speak of a decline of the empire depends on the perspective. Several provinces prospered "like never before", while indeed, the court in the capital city of Delhi experienced a considerable decline. The Mughal empire thus underwent a dramatic transformation towards regionalization, moving the power base from the center to the provinces, while the emperor was not overthrown but he rather kept his position as a toothless "ceremonial head". Popp describes the decline of the Mughal Empire as an excellent example for the disintegration of an empire from within. Power structures and the system of taxation were unintentionally designed to create conflicts of loyalty between the administrative officers and the rulers in Delhi and ultimately fostered regionalization. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the empire's central power as well as its capability to mobilize resources were considerably weakened. When British troops began to occupy the sub-continent, the Mughal empire was not able to keep its independent position and the last emperor was sent into exile.

How Do Empires Fall? Two Case Studies from Pre-Modern Southeast Asia

Tilman Frasch focuses on the decline of two Southeast Asian empires: the 'states' of Bagan (1050–1300) and Angkor (800–1250) thus isolating a series of external and internal reasons for their decline. One of the most striking reasons for their defragmentation was the systematic economical exhaustion by both empires. Bagan as well as Angkor devoted much of their resources in the building of religious monuments. Although both of their economies were basically strong, the steady exploitation of economic resources and labor force led to a considerable weakening. In addition to this internal process, external invasions and warfare triggered the end of both empires: In this context, the Mongol invasion played an important role, causing demographic disruptions and thus particularly accelerating the decline of the empire of Bagan.

On the one hand, Frasch highlights an explosion of expenditure and costs due to a policy of over-representation by the ruling classes through monumental, even gigantic buildings, on the other hand, he draws the attention to invasions of foreign aggressors such as the

Mongols. The combination of these challenges caused the disintegration of Angkor and Bagan through an overstretch of resources and demographic distortions.

3.4 The Americas

The Decline and Fall of the Inca Empire

Doris Kurella analyzes the fall of the South American Inca Empire, the largest of the indigenous empires in South America, having reached its maximum extension shortly before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadores. Kurella challenges the view of a rapid fall of the empire demonstrating that parts of the Inca elites had fought a more than 40 years' war of resistance against the Spanish invaders. Kurella poses the crucial question of how it was possible for a few hundred arriving Spanish soldiers to conquer an empire whose high level of sophistication, vast size, and its capability of administering enormous resources are a fact. She outlines a number of reasons for its decline and subsequent downfall, highlighting external, but much more internal factors.

Although we do not yet fully understand how the Inca empire functioned, we know that the Inca rule was characterized by extreme cruelty, leading to civil wars, uprisings, and revolts of subordinated indigenous peoples. Most of these revolts were quelled with extreme brutality before the Spanish conquistadores showed up. This situation left the Inca Empire very vulnerable at the very time when the Spanish troops arrived. Local resistance allowed the invaders to establish their dominion not mainly because of military victories, but rather by alliances with local indigenous groups. A further factor for the empire's downfall was its administrative structure with forced relocations and unstable, constantly renegotiable relationships with allies and subjugated commanders or leaders, that weakened its power structure immensely. Moreover, the outbreak of diseases and epidemics introduced by the invaders led to a demographic collapse. Kurella points out that we cannot exactly define which factors led to the empire's fall, due to the lack of indigenous sources. However, it is rather evident that the epic event was caused by a series of internal and external factors that all played together at the time when the conquistadores arrived.

The Downfall of Aztec Rule, 1519–21

Felix Hinz examines the downfall and the rapid ending of the Aztec alliance of the three city states of Tenochtitlán, Texcoco, and Tlacopan which he characterizes as a "Tribute Empire". According to Hinz, the decline of the Aztec alliance was the result of several internal as well as external factors. These factors combined allowed a few hundred Spanish conquistadores to bring down a military powerful and numerically superior alliance. One of the first reasons for the alliance's ending can be found in the structure of Aztec rule and administration that was based on violence, fear and the exploitation of subordinated tribes. The Aztecs built their rule on a system of tributes, rested on their military strength that either affected or threatened everyone in Central Mexico. A further internal factor that led

to the alliance's decline was its strict and rigid hierarchical system that blocked any mobility for almost the whole population. These internal power constellations weakened the Aztecs' position and created an important opposition from within. When the Spanish conquistadores arrived, they easily found allies who were willing to fight the Aztecs together with them. In addition, external factors, such as the superior Spanish weapon and armory technology made them much more effective in combat, even against superior numbers of enemies and the spread of diseases and epidemics that reduced the local population dramatically supported the quick decline of the Aztec tribute empire.

3.5 Middle Ages and Modern History

The Fall of the Napoleonic Empire

Michael Broers analyzes the downfall of the Napoleonic Empire during the second decade of the nineteenth century. "Incontrovertibly", as Broers mentions, "the first Napoleonic Empire and the entire French hegemony collapsed rapidly [. . .] as a result of a string of crushing military defeats and the diplomatic realignments concomitant on them". Besides this general observation, Broers locates an additional, major systematic weakness in the internal organization of the territories ruled by Napoleon. There was the actual French Empire, which in 1811 consisted of about 44 million inhabitants. Besides this, there was the so-called Napoleonic hegemony, a wide range of satellite kingdoms, ruled by his siblings. Broers indicates that the territories ruled by Napoleon and his subordinates were considerably overstretched and "impossible to sustain". Furthermore, the rapid expansion brought the empire into direct conflict with the rival empires of Britain and Russia and pushed the French into a longstanding conflict zone in Central Europe, from which Napoleon did not attempt to extract himself. A major factor in bringing down the Empire were the politics and diplomacy of Napoleon himself, who did not manage to create a sustainable structure for a long lasting and successful empire. When the final military blow came in 1814, the French Empire had already ceased to be an empire in any meaningful sense and its politics reverted to a purely national context.

The end of the Napoleonic Empire can be described by the classical, monocausal argument of a series of military defeats in decisive battles (Leipzig, Trafalgar, and Waterloo). But it would be too easy to stick only to this explanation. It was also the "satrapies" and appendages transferred to family members and relatives, which did not develop the same comparable central administration as the imperial core did. The rapid expansion and quick incorporation of new territories provoked not only the resistance of the conquered, but also the resistance of competing empires, such as the British Empire (the continental blockade was not a success for Napoleon) and the Russian hegemony in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, both of which fought the French Empire in their own ways. The progress made by the *Code Napoleon* and the endowment of royal dignity as to the dukes of the Rhine Confederation satellites was not sufficient to build a resilient, consolidated, and consenting imperial rule in Western and Central Europe. At the very

same time, concepts such as "freedom", "equality", and "fraternity", which could have supported the soft power of the Napoleonic empire, did not flourish for nations other than the French because of the dominant idea of exclusive French nationalism.

The End of the Spanish Colonial Empire[21]

Walter Bernecker scrutinizes the downfall of the Spanish empire during the nineteenth century, when most of the Spanish colonies in Central and South America became independent. He locates a series of external and internal factors that can be regarded as trigger for the disintegration of the empire. A series of substantial reforms modernized the local administrative structure and lowered the hierarchical ethnic boundaries between the multi-ethnic population of the Spanish colonies. The social modernization process started during the eighteenth century and weakened the position of the small white minority that ruled the colonies and was crucial in holding the empire together. As a result, independence movements emerged in many parts of the Spanish Empire and were further boosted by external influences during the late eighteenth century, most importantly by the French Revolution and the independence of the United States of America. Nationalist ideas came up during the same period and supported a growing process of alienation between the colonies' creole and the white population.

Emancipation efforts, supported by the liberation ideology of the French Revolution and the attained independence of the USA, and the emergence of the ideas of nationalism in Europe and their global spread, deepened the gap between the colored and the white population in the Spanish overseas empire. The growing dissatisfaction with the Spanish administration combined with external trade and economic policy pressures, especially the warlike and successful policies of the United States, led to the breakdown and the end of the New Hispanic Empire.

In the end, it was the empire's internal ethnical and administrative structure combined with external influences that contributed to different movements of independence. This resulted in the secession of most of the Spanish American colonies and thus in the collapse of an empire that had stretched over vast parts of the American continent for more than 300 years.

The End of the Portuguese Colonial Empire

David Schriffl describes the long reshaping and disintegration process of the Portuguese Empire that finally collapsed during the 1960s and 1970s after more than 400 years of existence. Schriffl highlights the shifting of the empire's focus from Asia to South America and, after the loss of Brazil, to Africa. The final decline of the Portuguese colonial empire resulted from different external but also internal factors. Schriffl emphasizes the Portuguese inability to create a unified economic zone with strong patterns of identification. A policy of resettling European white settlers to the African colonies during the 1960s and 1970s, at

[21] Original title: Das Ende des spanischen Kolonialreiches.

a time when strong, existing independence movements further increased ethnical tensions and triggered the decline of the empire. The flourishing of independence ideas throughout Africa during this period can be seen as a major additional external factor that weakened the empire and supported its defragmentation. At the same time, resistance against colonialism increased from within the Portuguese society, mainly by socialists or reformist catholic groups. All of these factors combined, together with nearly a decade of warfare in the colonies, finally forced the Portuguese to give up their empire during the 1960s and 1970s.

The end of the Portuguese overseas territory thus was the result of a long process of tri-continental transformation and reorientation from Asia to South America and Africa, which took place from the sixteenth century through the period after the Second World War. It was driven by a combination of endogenous and exogenous forces. An important factor for the decline was, on the one hand, the inability, but, on the other hand, also the impossibility to build up a homogeneous trading area with a functioning external tariff system due to the long distances from the mother country to the colonies. The attempt to settle colonists in Portuguese West and East Africa in the face of the socialist challenge and Soviet support for independence of later Angola and Mozambique strengthened the resistance of the colonies. The decolonization process thus served as an additional accelerator for the dissolution of the Portuguese residual empire in Africa.

The End of the Polish-Lithuanian Empire[22]

Bogusław Dybaś discusses the end of the Polish-Lithuanian Empire against the context of recent research outlining different perspectives. According to him, the Empire vanished during the late eighteenth century, when it was split up between its major neighbors, the Habsburg Empire, Prussia, and Russia. The Polish-Lithuanian Union has received little attention in research so far. It was based on a multitude of alliances, coalitions, and legal acts between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It existed for over 200 years from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century (1569–1795), and was officially called "Rzeczpospolita Korony Polskiej i Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego" (Royal Republic of the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania). It was practically an early modern hegemonic two-nation state, a republic of the nobility under the leadership of an elected king. In the course of the eighteenth century this empire came to an end, mainly due to its aggressively expanding neighbors. Before that, however, it had already been weakened by the Nordic War, which resulted in a growing dependence on the Russian Empire. Failures to execute structural reforms as well as the absence of a tight central power contributed to the continued diversity and heterogeneity of the Polish-Lithuanian Empire, which no longer allowed for the mobilization of sufficient resources to fend off external enemies and defend the cohesion of its union.

[22] Original title: Das Ende des polnisch-litauischen Großreichs als Diskussionsfrage.

3.6 The End of World War I

Structural Problems, Personal Failure, or Just Contingency? The End of the Russian Empire

Matthias Stadelmann focuses on the end of the centuries-old Russian monarchy, that practically emerged overnight in 1917 due to a critical culmination, overstress, and menace. As Stadelmann describes, the Russian Monarchist Empire suffered from several structural shortcomings as early as the nineteenth century. The rapid downfall in 1917 was further supported by a lack of reforms, stubborn adherence to autocracy and social inequality, as well as a consistent denial of political participation for most of the population. Internal reasons for decline prepared the ground for the empire's collapse. Economic, political, social, and structural shortcomings created a persistent resistance among broad layers of the population. Nevertheless, the Romanov monarchy still managed to firmly stick to the power until the decisive turning point of the First World War. The catastrophe of the war brought three years of warfare, the deaths of millions of people, impoverishment of broad layers of the population, and the ruthless over-exploitation of the empire's resources. Additionally, the Russian tsar weakened his own position by not granting any concessions to the population thus fundamentally weakening the empire's power structure. As Stadelmann concludes, "the cause of the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917 was, as simplistic as it may sound, the World War with its burdens".

A multifactorial analysis offers further insights into the empire's decline: Comparable to the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy, there were unresolved deficits due to the autocratic structure and the hierarchical social structure of this half Asian and half European hegemonic empire in the nineteenth century. Above all, however, the half-hearted reforms that came very late, only after the defeat in the war against Japan (1905), the continuation of authoritarian rule, blatant social differences such as the exploited and only seemingly liberated peasantry, and the prevention of political participation by the bourgeois urban strata caused a loss of legitimacy and loyalty, which led to a widespread refusal among the population to cooperate with the tsarist regime. The inevitable defeat in 1917/18 went hand in hand with the dismissal and the liquidation of the Romanovs. The outcome of the war ended in a catastrophe, from which the radicalism of a political minority, the Bolsheviks, profited. After poverty, civil war, and the rejection of new powers of intervention 1919–1921, Lenin relied on internal consolidation with the "New Economic Policy". Despite the propagated "socialism in one country", Stalin focused on an imperial reconstruction of an empire that had failed because of its internal shortcomings and contradictions.

The End of the German Empire 1918

Ewald Frie questions the year 1918 as the end of the German Empire. He does not actually analyze the collapse of an empire but rather describes the beginning of a transitory phase. As he suggests, the abdication of the German emperor and the end of the monarchy should not be seen as the factual end of German imperial efforts or ideologies. The German empire

persisted, he insists, "without emperor and without colonies, but with imperial goals to be pursued once the war was well and truly over." As he further states, German imperial efforts rather continued until the end of the Second World war in 1945. The year 1918 rather marked a transition expressed by regime change, and territorial losses, however, "it was not a starting point for decline, erosion or implosion of an empire". As Frie states, the transitory phase from monarchy to republic came with surprise. It was mainly due to the losses of four years of continuous warfare with all of its devastating results such as human deaths, starvation, economic overexploitation, social problems, and diseases. This, combined with an increasing political resistance from within the empire, led to the transition, or to "re-ordering [process] in a dramatic threat situation".

The loss of German territories provoked the striving to regain political greatness and stimulated the desire for imperial reconstruction. The collapse of the imperial army was ultimately caused by the war on several fronts. The Supreme Army Command (Oberste Heeresleitung) led by Erich Ludendorff und Paul von Hindenburg had largely detached itself from the emperor's command. It had thus contributed to the abdication of Wilhelm II and had practically initiated the end of the monarchy. The German Empire "without emperor and without colonies" held on to its hegemonic and ultimately imperialist aims, which Berlin continued to pursue, despite or precisely because of the "imperialist peace" of the victorious powers of 1919. This year was only a starting point for an imperial reconstruction policy, pursued with a continuous revision policy of the Parisian post-war order of the "Versailles system". It succeeded in the Weimar Republic, before Adolf Hitler was to continue it even more consistently and radically from 1933 onwards. The change of the political system was only an outwardly formal process; nothing substantial had changed in the political culture and mentality of German imperial and imperialist thinking.

The End of the Habsburg Monarchy

Matthias Stickler examines the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918. He describes the empire's downfall as a major political disaster that was hardly perceived in 1918/1919. Several internal and external factors can be hold responsible for the crucial event that changed the political landscape of Central and Eastern Europe fundamentally. Already before World War I, the multiethnic monarchy, which was mainly held together through the Habsburg emperor, had struggled politically and socially, because of severe unresolved political, constitutional, social, and ethnical problems.

The outbreak of the war worsened the situation. Four years of war, the overexploitation of the population, the loss of millions of people, as well as the lack of food and fuel dramatized internal resistance and spurred ethnical conflicts within the empire. Another blow for the struggling empire was the death of the 86-year-old emperor Franz-Joseph I. Stickler describes his successor, emperor Karl, as politically weak and "disadvantaged by fate". Subsequently, the loss of authority increased dramatically after his coronation and the loyalties of the majority of his subjects, including the strategically important civil servants and soldiers, shifted towards the emerging national councils in the different parts

of the empire. This triggered a defragmentation process that delivered the final blow to the empire.

There are also further reasons for the decline and breakdown of the Habsburg Monarchy, with external and internal factors interacting. Since the nineteenth century, the need to solve problems concerning the cohesion of this multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious hegemonic empire was increasing. Emperor Franz-Joseph, however, had no solution to the worsening conflict of nationalities at the level of the administration, constitution, society, and universities, but tried more or less to secure the social and political status quo. Moreover, the Great War hit an army inexperienced in war. During the war, the empire experienced massive internal problems, such as the shortage of personnel, food, and raw materials as well as the growing resistance against the war. After the death of Franz-Joseph I, who had acted as an identity-forming bracket, the weak and overburdened successor Karl could no longer compensate the loss of recognition and loyalty, which from 1916 on caused signs of dissolution.

The Long Lasting End of the Ottoman Empire

In his second contribution to the volume Lutz Berger offers an analysis of the Ottoman Empire's end after World War I, which constitutes the end of a declining process that started at latest during the nineteenth century. According to Berger, this was caused by different internal but in the end much more by external factors. The rapid military development in Europe had led to a weakening process of the once powerful empire. Without the power to impose its will. The Ottoman state disappeared as local elites all over the empire ceased to identify themselves with the empire and instead turned towards a nationalism that supported an empire-wide decentralization and defragmentation process.

Additionally, the social and economic gap between the center and world-economy was growing, and with it all measures to bring the empire's infrastructure, its army, and its administration to European standards turned out to be just too slow and inefficient to cope with the internal resistance. Consequently, the nineteenth century brought a series of wars of independence fought by different ethnicities from the Balkans to Kurdistan. At some point during the late nineteenth century, breaking up the empire even became the official agenda of some parts of the Ottoman political and social elites. The final blow, however, was delivered by the great power politics during and after the First World War. Weakened by a lost war, a lack of resources, and local independence and defragmentation processes, Ottoman elites had nothing more to set against the empire-wide ethnic nationalisms.

The end of the Ottoman Empire cannot really be seen as an abrupt collapse. It was a decline that had lasted since the nineteenth century, although even after the defeat in 1918, the Sultan was able to postpone the final end of his empire for a while. The Ottoman Empire did not fall apart until 1922. Thus it was the last of the four European empires that collapsed as a result of the first World War. The death of the only seemingly "sick man on the Bosporus" was ultimately caused by more external than internal factors. The energy-intensive and costly participation in that Great War weakened the Sultanate's rule in the long term, doing serious damage to its potential for justification and identification. A

specific Turkish nationalism against the new allied occupying forces gained the upper hand and then immediately achieved the revision of the disadvantageous Peace of Sèvres (1920) and the enforcement of a new Peace Treaty of Lausanne (1923).

3.7 The End of World War II and the Cold War

The Decline and Breakdown of the Fascist Italian Pseudo-Post-Roman Empire[23]

Carlo Moos discusses the collapse of the fascist Italian empire whose downfall began with its increasing approximation towards the National socialist German Empire after 1936. As Moos demonstrates, the support among the population dwindled, particularly after 1938 and 1940/41, when Italy became a de facto satellite of the Nazi empire. This dependency on Germany and its decisions provoked internal resistance and finally led to Mussolini's dismissal in 1943. The final blow for the fascist government came with the ceasefire Mussolini's successor Pietro Badoglio negotiated with the Allies and the country's quick occupation by the German Wehrmacht and, in the South, the advancing Allied troops. The fascist government tried to create an empire based on colonial expansion and an ideology and terminology building on perceptions of the ancient Roman Empire. However, as Moos puts it, it would be exaggerated to speak of a real empire. The political building the fascists created can rather be seen as the never accomplished "dream of an empire", wrongly understood in the sense of a *translatio imperii*. A dream that collapsed already during the first stage of an empire building process, because of its dependency on a much stronger ally, as well as because of the increasing internal resistance.

The loss of influence of the fascist *imperio* began with its rapprochement with the Nazi Reich and increased in the course of the latter's rise. From 1938/39 onwards, Mussolini came under increasing pressure when Italy was transformed into a shadow empire of the Nazi state from 1941 onwards. The growing internal resistance and external dependence on Hitler, which led to Mussolini's complete inferiority to the German emperor, sealed the political end of the *Duce*. Italian fascism was unable to build a real empire. It basically remained a pipe dream empire against the historical background of the *Imperium Romanum*, to which it tried in vain to emulate.

The Rise and Fall of Hitler's Empire (1933–1945)

Arnold Suppan reflects upon the most short-lived empire described in this volume. He depicts the reasons for the collapse of Adolf Hitler's National Socialist empire that ended after 12 years with the rampage of the Second World War and the "most profound collapse of civilization in modern times". As Suppan puts it, the fast imperial extension of the Nazi-German Reich would not have been possible without a "high level of support from almost

[23] Original title: Das Ende des faschistischen Imperiums.

all of the non-Nazi elite groups." Hitler's absolute power was based on strong elements of pseudo-religious beliefs "translated into the mysticism of national salvation and rebirth." As Suppan points out, a series of comparatively "cheap national successes" Hitler and his government achieved during the first years of their rule, convinced ever more parts of the society to accept his reign.

The actual declining process that started in 1942 was based on an imperial overstretch. The lack of resources and the increasing superiority of the empire's enemies were the main factors for the downfall of an empire that—as the Nazis had proclaimed—should last for at least 1000 years. The final collapse began in June 1944 when the Nazi empire had nothing to respond to the military and economic supremacy of the Allied Powers.

The National Socialist Reich was not only an empire of war, but also of exploitation, predation, and destruction. When it was no longer able to achieve its war aims, it switched to the mass killing of European Jews, which it carried out in a factory-based, industrial manner. It did not shrink from a relapse into total barbarism and a massive break with the foundational values of civilization. In the classical sense, empires defined their opponents as 'barbarians' in order to fight and defeat them. In the case of the Nazi war dictatorship, the state became a barbaric empire itself. The National Socialist policy was primarily aimed at exterminating conquered populations. Instead of integrating and winning them, they were exploited, oppressed, and finally displaced or destroyed. Thus, there was not only collaboration, but also massive sabotage and resistance. The Third Reich was an anti-religious, mono-ethnic, and mono-cultural Greater Germanic hyper-dominant empire, which did not embody a mission of liberation and peace, but only worked with pseudo-religious practices of rule and sharply repressive measures. It did not tolerate plurality and diversity within its territory, which was constantly expanding. This claim was already the germ of its failure and downfall. In the end, it was not only the unrestrained and uncontrollable over-expansion of his territory from 1940/41 onwards, but also the superiority of the anti-Hitler coalition, which in this combination forced the *Wehrmacht* to retreat and the infrastructure to adapt, causing a loss of energy and time.

The End of the USSR

Wolfgang Mueller scrutinizes the various (different) factors that led to the dissolution of the Soviet Empire in 1991. The Soviet Union, as one of the largest, global empires in the history of mankind, consisted of four "rings", as Mueller calls it, including the actual state of the Soviet Union with its 15 Soviet republics, the countries of its "outer empire" (Mongolia, Eastern Europe), communist client states (Cuba, Vietnam), as well as the communist parties in different countries all over the world. All of these rings were held together by different factors, such as military force, economic incentives, and the imperial and unifying idea of a communist world revolution.

The Soviet Union, as Mueller demonstrates, experienced several social, economic, and political crises during the last decades of its existence that constantly weakened the empire. The demise of the Soviet Union, as Mueller shows, was mainly the result of internal, domestic factors, such as an intensifying economic crisis, a growing disillusionment and

frustration with the regime and its ideology, and, especially during the last years, political liberties granted to the population that led to the emergence of nationalism within the multiethnic empire. External factors played only a minor role. In this context, Mueller mentions the relaxation of East-West tensions, which allowed a liberalization within the Soviet Union, the external affirmation of the Soviet leader's course by Western leaders and media and the deepening frustration of Soviet citizens about their own state upon learning more about the West. Of additional importance was the resistance that grew in the Soviet's empire satellite states.

Therefore, it was a combination of external and internal factors that contributed to the decline and in the end to the collapse of the Soviet empire: the permanent economic crisis and erosion of bureaucratic state socialism, the policy of détente with the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the CSCE succession process (1977–1989), connected with the emergence of civil societies as "second societies" in the satellite states, the creeping ideological erosion process, the Holy See as an opposing intellectual and spiritual empire during the Cold War, the overstretching of the Soviet sphere of power through the military intervention in Afghanistan, the NATO double decision (both in 1979), the lack of reaction to the change in communications technology, the inability to compete in the world economic context of globalization, the failure of COMECON compared with the successful model of the European Communities, the rapprochement of Central and Eastern Europe to the Western capitalist economic system, the failed reform efforts by Michail S. Gorbachev, and with it the self-renewal incapacity of the communist dictatorship.

A Never-Ending Empire? The Decline of the United Kingdom

Michael Gehler's and Tjark Strich's contribution deals with the end of the British Empire. The reasons for its erosion are explained by the competition and strife between new global empires, the reversal of the military protective function which had to be gradually ensured by the colonies and dominions, i.e. the loss of the ability to defend itself, but also by the loss of moderation in the sense of the balance of power in Europe, as well as the inferiority in the competition between the superpowers in times of decolonization.

Tensions between the ideologies of 'liberalism' and 'imperialism', hubris and a sense of superiority as well as the rise of Britain's rivals at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, served as further explanations and accelerated the Empire's gradual decline. Outsourced and outstripped by the United States in economic terms and challenged militarily by the German Reich, the British had to seek existentially necessary alliances in order to maintain the balance of power and their status as a leading great power, especially after the Second World War. Hand in hand with the decline went the failed attempt to mediate a simulation empire by transforming the classical Commonwealth into a Commonwealth of Nations. The First and Second World War or the Suez Crisis of the post-war period appear to be the immediate reasons for the disintegration, whereas the deeper causes of the decline of the British Empire itself can be found earlier.

A last sign of overcoming the idea of a crumbling empire, and still saving it, may be the attempt to prevent the EU from progressing further towards integration, or to influence or

even weaken it in such a way that it corresponds to the ideas of the British Conservatives and their Parliament—which has failed because the EU continues to exist. More than ever, the question remains whether the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland can continue to exist or if this Union will possibly be reduced to England and Wales.

America's Decline on Display: The Presidential Transition

In his contribution, Hans-Jürgen Schröder analyzes an empire that has been regarded as being in a process of decline, though the final outcome of this process has not been determined yet. Schröder describes, how the United States' role switched from being the most dominant player in the international community, or a primus inter pares, to one of many different relatively equal players. Beginning with a description of America's retreat from international politics under former president Trump's presidency, he draws the picture of an empire that has been disrupted by internal problems, unsolved structural domestic issues and a divided society. He highlights the January 2021 attacks on the congress as one of the most striking signs for the decay of the US empire. The attacks showed the internal crisis and indicated the "failure of the traditional political and economic elites to balance social and economic exigencies with global leadership", as Schröder points out.

Additionally, Schröder notices the rise of other powerful states that challenge the former US supremacy. In this context, Schröder mentions two key questions: Will the US push to revive the liberal international order? Is there a possibility of restoring the American Empire as the dominant power in the world? How the United States will react on these challenges is going to determine if their empire will persist or decline.

4 Final Considerations

In a recent paper John A. Hall reviewed the end of empires in a very sophisticated way.[24] He highlights the "sheer variety of imperial experience" and stresses that self-definition as an empire means little for the general question whether a given state can be qualified as 'empire' or not.[25] But as he correctly observes, "a respect for nominalism does not need to rule out the search for regularities".[26] As the main reasons for the decline of empires, he mentions the old-fashioned model of "corruption by urban life" and the loss of military effectiveness of a society because of hubris and laziness combined with a disinterest in cultures different from one's own. He further specifies a depletion of elite cohesion in transregional terms, the forfeiture of imperial attractiveness to the inner and outer worlds, an ongoing spread of imperial knowledge—called *Herrschaftswissen* in German—to outsiders and thus a growing competitiveness. Furthermore, he mentions the overextension

[24] Hall (2021).

[25] A good example for this is the USA. See Grandin (2019); Immerwahr (2019).

[26] Hall (2021: 529).

of territories and exhaustion of resources, the systematic rivalry between competing empires, and a tendency to "institutionalize the moment of success", resulting in a loss of flexibility.[27] All these are well-considered observations but as the contributions of this volume have shown, there is a larger dimension in the disintegration of empires, related to their complexity.

First off all, in identifying the possible causes, a distinction has to be made between endogenous and exogenous factors. As the chapters of this volume show, these issues are frequently interrelated or directly connected as there are always centrifugal and centripetal forces at work. Which of these factors have to be given decisive weight, is often difficult to decide.

Secondly, conceptually and terminologically, it is important to distinguish between long-term and gradual decline, between medium-term and accelerated erosion, as well as between abrupt and short-term implosion. Terms such as decomposition, diffusion, disintegration, division, dispersion, dismemberment, fission, and fragmentation or regionalization after partition, all which applied by the contributions of this volume, also mirror this broad range in variety.

Thirdly, a closer look may reveal that none of these concepts offers an appropriate and satisfying description of the historical affairs. What may look like decline and downfall at a first glance, may turn out to be more adequately characterized as transformation and change (with major structures and concepts surviving). In this case, it does not make sense to ask for the reasons of disintegration and dismemberment, but for the causes of resilience, change, and conversion. This also requires a change of perspective on the part of the historian since the guiding questions not so much revolve around failure and malfunction but focus much more on success and tenacity. The various contributions of this volume also offer such a perspective:

1. *Successful politics* was possible through leader-performance, credibility, ruler-prestige, elite recruitment, alternatives of action, competitiveness, communication performance to legitimize rule, transformation flexibility, and administrative efficiency. In addition, the following achievements loom large: preservation of authority, defense strategies against invasion, renunciation of conquest as *ultima ratio*, ability of error correction, "border" security, institutional strength and flexibility, the indivisibility of core territories, prevention of resource depletion, and over-expansion, and the ability to mitigate the tensions between center and periphery.
2. *Stability of society* was achieved by hierarchies, tax burden sharing and distribution of wealth. A balance between "imperial" court elites with transregional interests and ambitions on the one side, and "regional", locally bound elites on the other side, both sharing the imperial ideology and respecting each other's ambitions and interest is a fundamental request for any empire's success. The "integration" of imperial societies

[27] Hall (2021: 529–533).

into a common agenda can also include other competences: the existence of an urban middle class as a social mediating instance between nobility and peasants on the one hand, and for the integration of workers on the other, the prevention of both, civil wars and rivalries within the dynasty, the steering of migration flows, the control of opposing groups as well as the prevention of a demographic collapse due to epidemics.

3. *Military performance* depended on the ability to reform and adapt equipment and strategies, to be open for technological innovation and to change between expansion and defense readiness. Combat motivation plays a decisive role and is directly related to intervention range and expansion capability. The integration of foreign populations is a prerequisite for any empire but also here a certain balance appears to be essential.
4. *Economic success* was ensured by division of labor, diversity of markets, export capability, productivity, and growth. In the economic sphere, empires were concerned with maintaining control of trade flows and routes. They had to avoid starvation and famine resulting from crop failures and also had to secure stability. This way, successful empires developed an enormous pull effect towards regions far beyond their direct reach. To keep these borderland areas within the imperial orbit and under imperial (indirect) control is a major task for any empire.
5. *Culture as a soft factor* and valuable resource consists of a central message and mission, which ultimately enables ideological hegemony and political superiority over neighbors and the world. The power of ideology generates legitimation, "respect", and acceptance not only in the imperial core areas but also in the borderlands and far beyond.
6. Geography and contingency, although factors beyond the direct control of the imperial agents also loom large. The capacity to handle and explain unforeseen events, accidents and coincidences such as climate, epidemics, natural and environmental disasters and pandemics is essential. The protection of the imperial core by favorable geographical conditions and technically advanced fortifications are important factors in situations of crisis and challenge.

All these elements combined, create a complex structure of interaction in an ongoing process of challenge and testing. There is no "Augustan threshold" that finally decides about success or failure of empires. Challenge and adaptability are permanently needed as contraction and expansion are integral parts of an empire's DNA. Keeping the balance between diverging interests is a continuous task. Cohesion is permanently under stress as unexpected events were hiding everywhere and at any time. Seen through this lens, short-term empires may have been much more the rule than an exception. But there are also outstanding examples of resilience and longevity, durability, and persistence. Apparently, the various contributions of this volume cannot offer the one and single rule of thumb of how to describe an empire's downfall in general terms. Nonetheless, they yield a bundle of fundamental insights that transcend the simple question of downfall:

1. A clear rejection of monocausality: it is almost banal to state, but nevertheless important to emphasize that there were always several reasons that brought about the end of empires.
2. An intercontinental comparison of different empires does not reveal any fundamentally difference. There is no specific European or Asian empire and no specific concept of decline related to this geographical divisions.
3. There is also no fundamental difference between so-called 'modern' and 'premodern' empires. This division is rather artificial and does not bear substantial information about structures. This is not to deny processes of acceleration and dynamization that gain substantial momentum with the industrial revolution.
4. Endogenous challenges (in domestic politics) and centrifugal forces (on the peripheries) were business as usual and constant companions of empires.
5. Endogenous challenges and centrifugal forces always preceded the tendencies of decline, erosion, and implosion.
6. Exogenous factors and centripetal forces usually added to and accelerated the processes of erosion and exacerbated the crisis of cohesion.
7. Exogenous factors existed due to persistent and permanent external threats that could lead to partition or dismemberment. Protoglobalization and globalization put weight on transregional and transcontinental connectivity and entanglement that affected trade and economies. Ruptures in trade routes and embargos significantly weakened imperial economies. Exhaustive wars and total defeats (which led to implosions), epidemics, and environmental degradation because of climate changes were challenges that had to be met and properly explained.
8. The question of determining a specific and precise date or period of time when decline is supposed to have started, causes difficulties and often remains controversial. Even in the case of decisive military defeats and lost wars, the reasons and multiple causes for these events are difficult to grasp although they appear, at first glance, relatively clear.
9. Change did not always mean decline but transformation and restructuring. Despite all efforts to explore the reasons for the end of specific empires, it is important to highlight their energies of survival and future viability. To neglect and ignore such a perspective leads to the methodological problem of setting in motion an automaticity of interpretation that constructs a retrospective teleology of decay. In contrast, concepts such as "restructuring in decline" and various forms of transformation have to be acknowledged and be taken into account.

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Part I

Antiquity

Der Zusammenbruch des mesopotamischen Staates von Akkade

Hans Neumann

1 Die Begründung und Konsolidierung des Reiches von Akkade

Das frühstaatliche Mesopotamien in der Zeit vom ausgehenden 4. Jahrtausend bis zum 24. Jahrhundert v. Chr. ist durch die Entwicklung und Existenz einer Vielzahl von kleineren Staaten charakterisiert, deren Hauptorte das jeweilige Zentrum von Bewässerungsprovinzen mit den dazugehörigen dörflichen Siedlungen bildeten. Sie waren zum Teil gleichzeitig Sitz einer sich weiter verselbständigenden politischen Gewalt in Form eines monarchischen Königtums und in enger Verbindung damit zentrale Kultplätze. Gegen Mitte des 24. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. geriet dieses System miteinander konkurrierender und rivalisierender Stadtstaaten in eine gesellschaftshistorisch wirkungsmächtige Krise, die entscheidende Bereiche des gesellschaftlichen Lebens durchdrang, so dass Bedingungen herangereift waren, die nach Veränderungen drängten. Außer jenen Prozessen, die sich mit der Durchsetzung des Königtums gegenüber der Tempelaristokratie sowie mit den sich verschärfenden sozialen Gegensätzen verbanden, gehörten dazu auch neue Anforderungen, die sich aus der Organisation der Bewässerung, der Notwendigkeit zusätzlicher Landgewinnung sowie aus dem sich weiter ausdehnenden Handelsverkehr mit außermesopotamischen Gebieten und der zunehmenden, mehr und mehr erforderlichen Mobilität der Arbeitskräfte ergaben.[1]

[1] Vgl. zu den entsprechenden politischen und sozioökonomischen Entwicklungen, wie sie sich insbesondere auf der Basis der zur Verfügung stehenden keilschriftlichen Quellen nachzeichnen

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Insbesondere diese, vor allem im Bereich der sozioökonomischen Entwicklung festzustellenden Faktoren, die sich in einem komplexen gesellschaftlichen Beziehungsgeflecht gegenseitig bedingten bzw. aufeinander wirkten, führten zur Herausbildung eines größeren Territorialstaates in Mesopotamien,[2] wie er sich in der Konsequenz schließlich in dem durch Sargon (akkadisch *Šarru-kīn*) (2324-2285 v. Chr.)[3] begründeten Reich von Akkade manifestierte. Die politisch-territorialen Grundlagen dieses ca. 180 Jahre Bestand habenden sog. altakkadischen Staates mit seiner wohl in Mittelmesopotamien gelegenen, bislang allerdings noch nicht genau lokalisierbaren Residenzstadt Akkade/Agade,[4] wurden seitens Sargon durch ausgedehnte Feldzüge und militärische Unternehmungen geschaffen, in deren Verlauf zunächst der Süden Mesopotamiens bis zur Küste des Persischen Golfes, im weiteren dann Nordmesopotamien und Nordsyrien, und im Südosten schließlich Elam sowie das nördlich davon gelegene Gebiet erobert wurden.[5]

Bereits Sargon verband mit seinen Eroberungen erste Maßnahmen zur Absicherung seiner umfangreichen territorialen Landgewinne sowie zur Konsolidierung der inneren Verhältnisse. Nach Aussagen seiner Inschriften stützte sich die Königsherrschaft zur Zeit Sargons im Wesentlichen auf die eigene akkadische Militärmacht, zu deren Kern offensichtlich ein stehendes Heer in der Art eines berufsmäßigen Eliteverbandes von mehreren tausend Mann gehörte. Auch wenn Sargon in seinen Inschriften verkündet, dass „vom Unteren Meer an Söhne von Akkade die Statthalterschaften innehatten“, so wurden die Ämter der lokalen Statthalter im Süden Mesopotamiens in der Realität zu großen Teilen doch noch von den früheren Amtsinhabern aus der Zeit der Stadtstaaten ausgeübt, d. h., die lokalen Verwaltungsstrukturen blieben unter Sargon zunächst weitgehend unangetastet.[6] Andererseits ist damit auch klar, dass diese alte Elite einen gewissen Einfluss im Rahmen der altakkadischen Herrschaftssicherung behielt, was sich als nicht unproblematisch erweisen sollte. Einen direkten zentralen Eingriff in diese Struktur wohl mit dem Ziel der Sicherung des königlichen Einflusses im (eroberten)

lassen, umfassend Bauer, Englund und Krebernik 1998; vgl. darüber hinaus jetzt auch den Sammelband Dittmann and Selz (eds.) 2015.

[2] Vgl. dazu die Überlegungen bei Neumann 1992: 239–241.

[3] Zu den im Folgenden verwendeten absoluten Daten vgl. Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015: 135 f.

[4] Zu den Konventionen der Namensschreibung vgl. Foster 2016: XVI; vgl. auch ebd.: 30f.

[5] Zur Geschichte und Politik der Akkade-Dynastie sowie zu den sozioökonomischen und geistig-religiösen Grundlagen ihrer Herrschaft vgl. (mit Literatur) insbesondere Westenholz 1999; Neumann 2014; Foster 2016; Schrakamp 2017; jetzt auch Schrakamp 2020 und Michalowski 2020.

[6] Diese Auffassung kritisierend jetzt Schrakamp 2017: 90 f., der davon ausgeht, dass bereits Sargon auch in der Realität eine Politik betrieb, die „auf der Besetzung administrativer Schlüsselpositionen mit Gefolgsleuten (beruhte), die unabhängig von ihrer Herkunft in ein Netzwerk königlicher Patronagen eingebunden waren“. Dies schließt allerdings eine weitgehende Übernahme der, nunmehr (offiziell) “loyalen“ Angehörigen der alten Verwaltungsbürokratie nicht aus. Auch Schrakamp (2017): 91 konzediert letztlich, dass die Verwaltungsurkunden aus dem sumerischen Süden „eine deutliche Kontinuität lokaler Verwaltungsstrukturen“ dokumentieren.

Süden Mesopotamiens diente singulär allerdings die Einsetzung der Tochter des Sargon, Enḫedu'ana, als Hohepriesterin (zirru) des Gottes Nanna in Ur an der Küste des Persischen Golfes.

Maništūšu, Sohn und Nachfolger des Sargon auf dem Thron der Akkade-Dynastie,[7] richtete seine Konsolidierungsbemühungen auf die Sicherung und Erweiterung der ökonomischen Grundlagen des Herrscherhauses. Dabei ging es um die Ausdehnung des königlichen Bodeneigentums zunächst durch den Ankauf großer Ländereien, wie dies durch den sog. Maništūšu-Obelisk bezeugt ist. Danach kaufte der König in Nordbabylonien in der Gegend von Kiš aus dem Besitz örtlicher Großfamilien insgesamt 3430 ha Acker- und Weideland. Anteile am Königsland wurden an die im Dienste des Königs stehenden Personen als Versorgungs- oder Pachtland zur Nutzung vergeben.[8]

Ein ähnliches Ziel verfolgte der Bruder und Nachfolger des Maništūšu auf dem Thron, Rīmuš, allerdings mit anderen Mitteln. Überlieferte Quellen, wie die sog. Rīmuš-Stele, legen nahe, dass die angestrebte Vergrößerung des königlichen Grundbesitzes hier – zumindest zum Teil – durch Okkupation von Ackerland infolge militärischer Auseinandersetzungen möglicherweise zu Beginn der Herrschaft des Rīmuš erfolgte. Nach der plausiblen Interpretation von Benjamin R. Foster haben wir hier ein Zeugnis für die gewaltsame Enteignung umfangreicher Ländereien in der Provinz Lagaš im Süden Mesopotamiens vor uns, die in dieser Region des Bewässerungsbodenbaus in erster Linie zu Lasten des örtlichen Provinzial- und Tempeleigentums ging und zugunsten königlicher Würdenträger und militärischer Hauptleute mit dem jeweiligen personellen Anhang erfolgte. Flächenmäßig umfasste diese Enteignung insgesamt 133.979 ha mit 17 Städten und 8 Siedlungen. Nach Ingo Schrakamp dürfte dies „etwa 2 % der gesamten Ackerfläche Babyloniens entsprochen haben".[9] Derartige Vorgänge waren natürlich mit einer Entmachtung der lokalen Administrationen verbunden, die in Aufstände gegen den wohl in der Folge einer Palastrevolte zur Macht gelangten König verwickelt waren und somit den Anlass für eine mit äußerster Härte durchgeführte Befriedungspolitik des Rīmuš im südlichen Teil des Reiches lieferten.

[7] So mit Steinkeller 2003: 278 f.; vgl. auch Steinkeller 2017: 14 sowie Frahm 2013: 119. Anders Schrakamp 2017: 83 Anm. 2, der (zusammen mit anderen) an der traditionellen Abfolge Sargon – Rīmuš – Maništūšu festhält. Auf das Problem der Königsabfolge in der frühen Akkade-Zeit soll an anderer Stelle nochmals eingegangen werden. Zu den absoluten Daten für die Regierungszeit von Maništūšu und Rīmuš vgl. Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015: 136 (2284-2262 v. Chr.).

[8] Zum Maništūšu-Obelisk vgl. zuletzt Schrakamp 2017: 94 f.

[9] Zur Rīmuš-Stele und zu den entsprechenden Interpretationsansätzen (mit Literatur) vgl. zuletzt Schrakamp 2017: 93 f.

2 Krise und erneuter Machthöhepunkt des Reiches von Akkade

Vielleicht nicht zuletzt gerade deswegen blieb der Staat von Akkade labil, zumal auch die internen Machtkämpfe innerhalb des Königshauses, die wahrscheinlich auch unter Rīmuš zu einer Palastrevolte führten, zur Schwächung der staatlichen Zentralgewalt beitrugen. Zwar war Rīmuš ein wichtiger Schlag gegen den oppositionellen Süden gelungen, jedoch bedeutete die Entmachtung der lokalen Administrationen nicht, dass die insbesondere durch Familiennetzwerke und ökonomisch miteinander verbundene örtliche Provinzial- und Tempelaristokratie ein für allemal niedergerungen worden wäre.

Dies zeigt sich bereits innerhalb der Regierungszeit des vierten Akkade-Herrschers Narām-Sîn (2261-2206 v. Chr.), der sich zu Beginn seiner Herrschaft oder recht bald danach einer gewaltigen Aufstandsbewegung gegenübersah, die für den Bestand des altakkadischen Staates mit Sicherheit eine bedrohliche Krise darstellte. Kern dieses Aufstandes waren Koalitionen im Süden Babyloniens unter Führung der lokalen Aristokratie von Uruk – das uns auch später noch begegnen wird – und im Norden unter Führung von Kiš. Der Überlieferung nach benötigte Narām-Sîn ein ganzes Jahr, um die Rebellion schließlich in neun Schlachten niederzuschlagen und in der Folge dem Reich von Akkade seine einstmalige Größe wieder zurückzugeben.

Die Befriedungspolitik des Königs gegenüber den südmesopotamischen Reichsteilen mit ihrer vorrangig sumerisch sprechenden Bevölkerung war mit Blick auf die zunächst geschlagene Opposition darauf gerichtet, sowohl die eigene Herrschaft demonstrativ-ideologisch zu legitimieren als auch militärisch-ökonomisch weiter abzusichern. So nahm Narām-Sîn im Rahmen seiner Titulatur als Herrscher erstmalig den Titel „König der Vier Weltgegenden“ an, worin der Machtanspruch des Herrschers wie auch dessen gesellschaftspolitische Bedeutung klar zum Ausdruck kommt. Die unter Narām-Sîn wiedererlangte Macht der Dynastie von Akkade gab dem König zudem die politischen Mittel in die Hand, sein Königtum ideologisch-religiös weiter zu untermauern. Narām-Sîn war der erste mesopotamische Herrscher, der sich vergöttlichen ließ und als „Gott von Akkade“ bezeichnet wurde, und zwar mit ausdrücklichem Einverständnis der Götter des Reiches, wie es in einer Inschrift auf einer Statuenbasis aus dem nordmesopotamischen Bāseṭkī, dem – wie wir seit kurzem wissen – alten Mardaman,[10] u. a. heißt:

> „Narām-Sîn, der Mächtige, der König von Akkade: Als die vier Weltgegenden zusammen sich gegen ihn empörten, durch die Liebe, die Ištar ihm entgegenbrachte, (hat er) 9 Schlachten in einem Jahr siegreich bestanden und darüber hinaus die Könige, die sich gegen ihn erhoben hatten, gefangengenommen. In Bezug auf (die Tatsache), dass in der Notlage die Fundamente seiner Stadt er dauerhaft gemacht hatte, haben (die Bewohner) seine(r) Stadt von der Göttin Ištar in Eanna (also Uruk), von dem Gott Enlil in Nippur, von dem Gott Dagān in Tuttul, von der Göttin Ninḫursaĝ in Keš, von dem Gott Enki in Eridu, von dem Gott Sîn in Ur, von dem

[10] Vgl. Pfälzner und Faist 2020.

> Gott Šamaš in Sippar, von dem Gott Nergal in Kutha als Gott ihrer Stadt Akkade ihn sich erbeten und inmitten von Akkade seinen Tempel errichtet . . .“.[11]

Der König galt nunmehr als Schutzgott des Landes, der nicht mehr mit einem bestimmten städtischen Kultzentrum in Verbindung zu bringen war, sondern für das Wohl des gesamten Reiches zu sorgen hatte. Ausgangspunkt der Königsvergöttlichung war die sich jetzt in den Händen des Königs konzentrierende Machtfülle, die es dem Herrscher gestattete, sich mit göttlichen Attributen zu versehen. Vor allem aber sollte durch die Vergöttlichung der Machtanspruch verdeutlicht werden, den der König gegenüber den Bewohnern seines ausgedehnten Territoriums, der Priesteraristokratie sowie den noch existierenden gentildemokratischen Institutionen – repräsentiert etwa durch die in den Quellen bezeugten „Ältesten“ – erhob. Damit versuchte der König nicht zuletzt auch die religiös-kultisch im Süden verankerte sumerische Opposition loyal zu stimmen, denn schließlich waren es ja auch deren Götter, die sich dem Wunsch der Akkader nach Vergöttlichung des Königs nicht verschlossen hatten.[12]

Für Narām-Sîn war mit Blick auf die Probleme seiner Vorgänger darüber hinaus klar, dass die Politik der akkadischen Zentralgewalt gegenüber dem sumerischen Süden letztlich nur dann erfolgreich sein konnte, wenn man die ideologisch-religiösen Grundlagen der sumerischen Gesellschaft nicht nur beachtete, sondern sie sich auch zunutze machte. In diesem Zusammenhang ordnete er ein besonderes Bauvorhaben an, nämlich die Rekonstruktion und prachtvolle Ausschmückung des Ekur, des Tempelheiligtums des sumerischen Gottes Enlil in Nippur, der nach religiöser sumerisch-babylonischer Vorstellung als Leiter der göttlichen Ratsversammlung an der Spitze des südmesopotamischen Pantheons stand. Gemäß der Zielsetzung war das Bauprojekt keine lokale Angelegenheit, sondern stand unter der Leitung hoher königlicher Beamter. Die Akkader verhandelten stets direkt mit dem obersten Tempelverwalter des Ekur, nicht mit der örtlichen Verwaltung.[13]

Derartige, auf das Erreichen und die Sicherung des Wohlwollens der sich mit dem zentralen Kultort des Enlil verbindenden südmesopotamischen Elite gerichtete kultisch-religiöse Aktionen untersetzte der König mit administrativ-militärischen Maßnahmen zur Verfestigung zentralstaatlicher Kontrolle im Reich, indem er z. B. in einigen Städten

[11] Zur Inschrift vgl. (mit Literatur) Frayne 1993: 113 f. (E2.1.4.10); Sazonov 2007: 331 f.; abweichend Foster 2016: 13 und 318 f. (18) mit den Bemerkungen ebd.: 27 Anm. 39.

[12] Zum Problem der Vergöttlichung des Narām-Sîn und zu deren gesellschaftspolitischer Bedeutung vgl. etwa Sallaberger 2002: 93–98; Sazonov 2007: 330–333; Michalowski 2008: 34–35; Král 2010; Schrakamp 2017: 116; vgl. im vorliegenden Zusammenhang jetzt auch Neumann und Neumann 2020.

[13] Zu dem Bauvorhaben, dokumentiert durch das sog „Akkadian Archive“ von Nippur, vgl. zuletzt (mit Literatur) Schrakamp 2017: 113–115.

Militärgarnisonen errichtete bzw. Truppenteile stationierte.[14] Hierzu passt auch, dass eine Tochter des Narām-Sîn, Tūtanapšum, die Hohepriesterin-Würde des Enlil in Nippur übertragen bekam,[15] womit die königliche Familie einen direkten Einfluss auch im Bereich der sumerisch-südmesopotamischen Kultausübung geltend machen konnte. Ähnliche Inthronisationsmaßnahmen im kultischen Bereich wie in Nippur erfolgten unter Narām-Sîn daher auch nicht zufällig in Ur, dem Sitz des Mondgottes, und in Sippar, dem Hauptkultort des Sonnengottes.[16]

Dem König war allerdings bewusst, dass er zur Sicherung der bestehenden Herrschaftsverhältnisse auch über eine ausreichende ökonomische Machtbasis verfügen musste. In Fortführung der Politik seiner Vorgänger erreichte er dies durch die Bildung landwirtschaftlicher Domänen im südlichen Mesopotamien, wie sie etwa durch Archive aus Pugdan in Nordbabylonien, aus den Regionen Umma und Lagaš weit im sumerischen Süden und aus Maškanili'Akkade in Mittelbabylonien bezeugt sind. Sie standen unter Leitung und Kontrolle von hohen königlichen Beamten bzw. von Angehörigen der königlichen Familie und agierten als komplexe Wirtschaftseinheiten, deren Erträge der akkadischen Zentralgewalt und deren loyalen Gefolgsleuten zugute kamen. Die Domänen befanden sich in unmittelbarer Nachbarschaft städtischer Zentren und traditioneller Tempelwirtschaften und standen letztlich in Konkurrenz zu ihnen. Domänenverantwortliche übernahmen nach einiger Zeit zum Teil auch das politische Spitzenamt in einer Provinz, namentlich das Amt des lokalen Statthalters, des Ensi, bei gleichzeitigem Fortbestehen traditioneller Verwaltungsstrukturen.[17]

3 Krise und Untergang des Reiches von Akkade

Wie die Geschichte immer wieder zeigt, steckt in der politisch-wirtschaftlichen Blüte eines Gemeinwesens bereits der Keim ihres Nieder- und Untergangs. Dies gilt auch für die Geschichte des mesopotamischen Akkade-Reiches. Schon bald nach dem Regierungsantritt des gleichfalls vergöttlichten Königs Šarkališarrī (2205-2181 v. Chr.), des Nachfolgers von Narām-Sîn, begann der Niedergang der Akkade-Dynastie. Es zeigte sich, dass die auf Stabilität, Herrschaftssicherung und Prosperität gerichteten religiös-kultischen, politisch-militärischen und ökonomischen Maßnahmen des Narām-Sîn den latenten Gegensatz zwischen der akkadischen Zentralgewalt und der südmesopotamisch-sumerischen Provinzial- und Tempelaristokratie nicht aufzulösen vermochten. Im

[14] Vgl. im vorliegenden Zusammenhang Foster 2016: 168 bezüglich der Versorgung von Truppenkontigenten in verschiedenen Städten des sumerischen Südens; vgl auch ebd.: 79 zur möglichen Militärpräsenz in Nagar im Ḫābūr-Gebiet.

[15] Vgl. Löhnert 2014–2016 (mit Literatur); Kraus 2020.

[16] Vgl. Foster 2016: 140; Schrakamp 2017: 91.

[17] Zu den königlichen Domänen und ihrer sozioökonomischen Bedeutung vgl. zuletzt zusammenfassend Schrakamp 2017: 96–104.

Gegenteil: Sie vertieften diesen Gegensatz noch, indem sie den Handlungsspielraum der lokalen politischen Körperschaften zunehmend einschränkten, in deren kultische Belange eingriffen und vor allem die Eigentumsverhältnisse im Süden zugunsten des Königshauses zu verändern suchten. Dies zeigt sich auch in der späteren historisch-literarischen Reflexion des Untergangs des Akkade-Reiches, worauf noch zurückzukommen sein wird.

Die konkrete Phase des Niedergangs erstreckte sich über ca. 50 Jahre und umfasste etwa zwei Drittel der Herrschaftszeit des Šarkališarrī, der wie Maništūšu und Rīmuš gleichfalls einer Palastrevolte zum Opfer gefallen zu sein scheint; es folgten eine dreijährige Krisenperiode, in der sich vier Thronprätendenten um die Herrschaft stritten und schließlich die ca. 35-jährige Regierungszeit der beiden letzten Herrscher Dudu (2177-2157 v. Chr.) und Šu-Durul (2156-2142 v. Chr.).

Der unter Narām-Sîn und Šarkališarrī fortbestehende Gegensatz zwischen zentralem Königtum und lokaler Verwaltungs- und Tempelaristokratie beförderte immer wieder partikularistische Bestrebungen insbesondere in Südbabylonien mit den Zentren Girsu und Uruk, die sich jegliche Schwäche der Zentralgewalt zunutze machten.

Damit einher gingen zunächst militärische Auseinandersetzungen mit den im Ǧabal Bišri und in den angrenzenden bzw. vorgelagerten Wüstensteppen beheimateten halbnomadischen Amurritern im Rahmen der Expansionspolitik des Šarkališarrī in Richtung Nordsyrien, vielleicht aber auch bereits in Abwehr eines beginnenden nomadischen Vordringens aus der Region des mittleren Euphrats in den mesopotamischen Kulturraum. Hinzu kamen die militärischen Attacken der Elamer aus dem Südwestiran und der Gutäter aus dem Zagros im Osten. Letztere wurden bereits unter Šarkališarrī zu einer ernsten Bedrohung für die politische und ökonomische Stabilität des Reiches.[18] Davon zeugt ein altakkadischer Brief jener Zeit aus dem südbabylonischen Girsu, in dem es wörtlich heißt:

> „Folgendermaßen Iškun-Dagān, zu Lugalra: Das Feld bestelle und bewache das Vieh! Außerdem sage nicht: ‚Die Gutäer (sind da)! Das Feld konnte ich nicht bestellen!' Jede halbe Meile (= ca. 5 km) stelle Wachposten auf und du bestelle das Feld! Sobald sie (= die Posten) die (feindlichen) Soldaten bemerken, sollen sie für dich einen (Entlastungs-)Angriff unternehmen und (du) bring das Vieh zur Stadt! [Soll]te (es heißen): ‚Das Vieh haben die Gutäer weggeführt' und ich soll (dazu) überhaupt nichts sagen, dir (vielleicht noch) Silber geben? Schau, (beim) Leben des (Königs) Šarkališarrī schwöre ich: Wenn die Gutäer Vieh fortführen, wirst du gewiss selbst (den Ersatz dafür) geben! Sobald ich zur Stadt komme, werde ich dir (natürlich) Silber geben –, und du wirst das Vieh nicht bewachen? Die regulären Ertragslieferungen werde ich von dir einfordern. Meine Anweisung sollst du zur Kenntnis nehmen."[19]

[18] Zu den sich mit dem Niedergang des Akkade-Reiches verbindenden politisch-militärischen Ereignissen und ihren Folgen ab der Regierungszeit des Šarkališarrī vgl. im einzelnen Glassner 1986: 39–54; Westenholz 1999: 56–59; Foster 2016: 22–25; Kraus 2018: 7 f.

[19] Zum Text, zur vorliegenden Übersetzung und zu dem folgenden inhaltlichen Kommentar vgl. zuletzt (mit Literatur) Neumann 2006: 5 f.; vgl. auch die Bemerkungen bei Schrakamp 2017: 100.

Der Absender Iškun-Dagān, ein hoher Funktionär der königlichen Verwaltung, ermahnt hier den Adressaten Lugalra, den obersten Verwalter einer königlichen Domäne in der Region Lagaš in Südbabylonien,[20] dafür zu sorgen, dass die in dessen Verantwortungsbereich[21] befindlichen Felder bestellt und die Viehherden bewacht werden. Um sich vor unliebsamen Raubzügen der Gutäer zu schützen, soll Lugalra zunächst Wachposten aufstellen, im Ernstfall dann der Gefahr militärisch begegnen und gleichzeitig das Vieh in Sicherheit bringen. Eine eventuelle (Schutz-)Behauptung, die Gutäer hätten das Vieh fortgeführt, würde von Iškun-Dagān nicht akzeptiert werden und die alleinige Ersatzpflicht des Adressaten zur Folge haben. Nur bei Beachtung der Hinweise des Iškun-Dagān würden die im Rahmen der staatlichen Verwaltungstätigkeit üblichen Zahlungen und Ertragsabgaben erfolgen.

Der Brief zeigt recht deutlich, dass man zur Zeit des Königs Šarkališarrī im Süden Mesopotamiens bereits häufiger mit Übergriffen der Gutäer zu rechnen hatte, was gewiss als eine Folge der zunehmenden inneren Instabilität des altakkadischen Reiches gewertet werden kann.

Bei oder kurz nach dem Tod des Šarkališarrī gerieten die Verhältnisse buchstäblich außer Kontrolle. Eine halbwegs geordnete Königsnachfolge gab es nicht und in dieser Zeit der streitenden Thronprätendenten gelang es wohl den Gutäern, sich in Mittelbabylonien festzusetzen.[22] Im Süden etablierten sich aus den Provinzialverwaltungen heraus lokale Dynastien. Diesen hatte die sich unter Dudu und Šu-Durul letztmalig und kurzzeitig – allerdings nur in Obermesopotamien und Nordbabylonien – stabilisierende akkadische Zentralmacht nicht wirklich etwas entgegenzusetzen. Ein kürzlich von Nicholas Kraus publizierter altakkadischer Brief aus Umma lässt die Situation recht deutlich werden. Darin heißt es u. a.:

> „Folgendermaßen Išarum, [z]u Mesaĝ: In Bezug auf die Tatsache, dass Lugalĝiš [und] KA-Utu … Wie kann mein treuer Diener, der meine Füße gehalten hat, feindlich werden? (Bei den Göttern) Ištar und Ilaba schwöre ich: er möge sich [mir] zuwenden, die Waffe des Blutes werde ich gegen [ihn] nicht erheben. Von nun an werde ich ihn erneut als Statthalter (Ensi) von Gutiu [m] bestimmen[23]. Warum wurden seine Boten nach Puš (in Nordbabylonien) umgeleitet?[24] Tatsächlich hatte er Angst und hat sich mir [nicht] zugewandt. Jedoch, ich weiß (sehr wohl),

[20] Zum Lugal-ra-Archiv vgl. zuletzt zusammenfassend Schrakamp 2017: 99 f.

[21] Dass „the estate in question was situated in the Adab province“, wie Steinkeller 2015: 282 Anm. 14 vermutet, ist mit Blick auf den Archivzusammenhang wenig wahrscheinlich.

[22] Sowohl die zeitlichen Abläufe als auch die genaue geographische Ausdehnung der gutäischen Machtetablierung in Teilen Mesopotamiens bleiben nach wie vor umstritten und unsicher; vgl. dazu zuletzt Sallaberger and Schrakamp 2015: 113–130; Steinkeller 2015.

[23] So mit Kraus 2018: 3; davon abweichend Arbøll and Westenholz 2019, die am Ende der (beschädigten) Zeile statt -u[m] SU oder ZU lesen und den Satz entsprechend anders interpretieren: „From that point on I shall appoint for him his Ensi-ship anew“. Zwingend scheint mir das aufgrund der erhaltenen Zeichenspuren allerdings nicht zu sein.

[24] Abweichend Arkhipov and Loesov 2020.

> dass er meine Füße hält![25] Er soll zu mir kommen und seine Stadt soll unver[sehrt] bleiben. Wenn er nicht zu mir kommt und seinen Sinn anderweitig ausrichtet, (dann) werde ich seine Stadt vernichten,[26] und er [möge] vorbereitet sein, Zusätzliches zu empfangen (= die Konsequenzen zu tragen)! Was seine *nisqū*-Truppen angeht, die er nach Uruk schickte, so soll er keine Angst haben, [er] soll sich mir zuwenden. . . .“[27]

Der Absender, mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit ein Sohn des Königs Dudu, beklagt sich gegenüber Mesaĝ, dem Statthalter von Umma und Chef der königlichen Domäne von Saĝub in der Region von Umma,[28] dass sich Lugalĝiš, ganz gewiss der Statthalter von Adab in Mittelbabylonien,[29] der ihm immer treu ergeben war, offensichtlich von ihm abgewandt hatte. Mesaĝ möge daher dafür sorgen, dass Lugalĝiš sich wieder der Befehlsgewalt des Königs unterwirft. Dann hätte der abtrünnige Ensi auch nichts zu befürchten. Zudem würde er ihn zum Statthalter der Gutäer in Mittelbabylonien machen. Für den Fall der Weigerung müsste Lugalĝiš allerdings mit der Zerstörung seiner Stadt (Adab) rechnen. Die im Brief enthaltene Information, dass Lugalĝiš Truppen[30] nach Uruk entsandt hatte, könnte darauf hindeuten, dass Uruk in eine Rebellion verwickelt war[31] und Lugalĝiš diese mit eigenem militärischen Personal unterstützt hatte. Išarum deutet daher an, dass dem Lugal-ĝiš, selbst wenn dieser Truppen nach Uruk geschickt hat, vergeben wird. Išarum hoffte also auf einen Seitenwechsel des Lugalĝiš wohl durch Vermittlung des Mesaĝ.[32]

Die Hilflosigkeit der akkadischen Zentralmacht ist hier allenthalben zu greifen. Die Gutäer waren in Mittelbabylonien bereits eine feste politische Größe, die der König akzeptieren musste und formal allenfalls der Statthalterschaft Adabs mit eigenem Titel unterstellen konnte. In Uruk, das schon einmal Anführer einer Koalition gegen den akkadischen König Narām-Sîn gewesen war, rebellierte erneut und begründete eine eigene Dynastie, über die aber nicht viel bekannt ist. Adab stellte sich an die Seite von Uruk, und

[25] So mit Arbøll and Westenholz 2019.

[26] Anders Kraus 2018: 3, der hier *ušmāt* als 3. Pers. Sg. auffasst.

[27] Vgl. die Kopie und Bearbeitung mit Kommentar bei Kraus 2018: 2–5 (ROM 910x209.625) sowie die Bearbeitung und Ausführungen ebd.: 5–7 zu dem in den vorliegenden Kontext zu stellenden Brief STTI 185 = Kienast und Volk 1995: 116–119 (Gir 37).

[28] Zur Identität von Absender und Adressaten vgl. Kraus 2018: 4; zum Mesaĝ-Archiv vgl. zusammenfassend (mit Literatur) Schrakamp 2017: 98 f.

[29] Zum Statthalter Lugalĝiš von Adab vgl. Pomponio 2015: 194.

[30] Hier als *nisqū* bezeichnet. Zu dieser Personengruppe vgl. zusammenfassend (mit Literatur) Schrakamp 2017: 108 f. („Gruppe, die in der Landwirtschaft und im Militär tätig und unmittelbar dem König verpflichtet war und durch hohen sozialen Status und materiellen Wohlstand entlohnt wurde“); Kraus 2018: 5 („an elite type of military/para-military personnel“).

[31] Vgl. Kraus 2018: 2.

[32] Nach Kraus 2018: 3 enthielt der Brief damit auch eine Botschaft an den Adressaten in Umma: „The implication to Me-sag, who interestingly is not directly addressed in the letter at all, is consequently the same: continue to be loyal, and all will be well“.

die Antwort des Königs hierauf ist eine Mischung aus Bitten und Drohen. Der Brief macht damit deutlich, dass die in Babylonien beheimateten Statthalter durch militärische Aktionen bei wechselnden Loyalitäten versuchten, die Oberherrschaft der akkadischen Könige abzuschütteln, wobei ihnen der Druck der Gutäer auf Mittel- und Nordbabylonien sehr zupass kam. Allerdings blieb die erneute Stadtstaatenbildung auf den Süden Babyloniens begrenzt, da in der weiteren Folge der historischen Ereignisse die Gutäer in Mittel- und Nordbabylonien eine eigene Dynastie mit Sitz in Adab begründeten. Jedenfalls ging mit den letzten Jahren der altakkadischen Dynastie um 2100 v. Chr. die politisch-historische Initiative vom Norden wieder auf den Süden Mesopotamiens über. Das Reich von Akkade war Geschichte.

4 Reflexion des Untergangs des Reiches von Akkade und Fazit

Der Zusammenbruch des Reiches war in seiner politisch-mentalen Wirkung gewaltig, was sich unter anderem darin zeigt, dass insbesondere die Könige Sargon und Narām-Sîn bis in das 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr. hinein Gegenstand literarischer Kompositionen und – zusammen mit Šarkališarrī – historische Leitfiguren in der Omenliteratur wurden. In der Gelehrtentradition des alten Mesopotamien – und darüber hinaus – waren Aufstieg und Fall des Akkade-Reiches stets präsent.[33]

Im vorliegenden Zusammenhang interessiert nun vor allem die spätere literarische Tradition, die speziell den König Narām-Sîn zum Gegenstand hat. Diese war recht ambivalent, indem sie nämlich teilweise eine negative Sicht auf den Herrscher enthielt, was zunächst verwundert, konnte sich Narām-Sîn mit seiner Politik – was deren innen- und außenpolitische Erfolge betrifft – mit der seines berühmten und in der späteren Tradition durchweg positiv beurteilten Ahnen Sargon vergleichen. Insgesamt hinterließ Narām-Sîn – nach allem, was wir wissen – seinem Nachfolger Šarkališarrī nach einer recht langen und letztlich erfolgreichen Regierungszeit ein im wesentlichen intaktes und prosperierendes Staatswesen, allerdings mit all den damit verbundenen und bereits thematisierten problematischen Implikationen.[34]

In der sumerischsprachigen Erzählung „Fluch über Akkade“, einer Komposition, die durch eine Vielzahl zumeist fragmentarischer Abschriften insbesondere aus der altbabylonischen Zeit überliefert ist,[35] werden die Regierungszeit und die Persönlichkeit des Naram-Sîn jedoch ganz anders dargestellt und bewertet. Grundsätzlich geht es in der besagten Dichtung um die literarische Reflexion des Aufstiegs und Niedergangs der Dynastie von Akkade, wobei Aufstieg und Blüte des Reiches mit Sargon, Krise und Untergang dagegen mit Naram-Sîn in Verbindung gebracht werden. Letzteres stand jedoch nachweislich im Widerspruch zur historischen Realität. So soll Narām-Sîn, von dem sich

[33] Vgl. dazu umfassend informierend zuletzt (mit Literatur) Foster 2016: 245–286.

[34] Vgl. im vorliegenden Zusammenhang auch Neumann 2019.

[35] Zur Dichtung vgl. zuletzt Cavigneaux 2015; Foster 2016: 350–358; Attinger 2019; Attinger 2020.

die Götter abgewandt hatten, in Trauerkleidung gehüllt sieben Jahre lang versucht haben, durch Orakelanfragen bezüglich des (Wiederauf-)Baus des Enlil-Heiligtums Ekur in Nippur zu erreichen, dass sich Enlil, der sumerische Götterkönig, wieder in Gunst ihm zuwandte. Als dies nicht gelang, griff Narām-Sîn zu den Waffen, überfiel mit einem Heer Nippur und plünderte die Stadt. Der darüber erzürnte Enlil ließ daraufhin die im Gebirge ansässigen Gutäer in Babylonien einfallen, die das Land mit Krieg überzogen, so dass in dem einstmals so blühenden Reich von Akkade nunmehr Unsicherheit und Hunger herrschten. Die großen Götter belegten Akkade mit einem schweren Fluch, der die Zerstörung und Verwüstung der Hauptstadt und seines Umlandes bewirken sollte und schließlich auch bewirkt hatte. Abgesehen davon, dass der historische Nieder- und Untergang Akkades nicht in die Zeit des Königs Narām-Sîn zu datieren ist, entspricht auch die geschilderte Zerstörung von Nippur durch Narām-Sîn nicht der historischen Realität, da es ja gerade Narām-Sîn war, der durch ein ehrgeiziges Bauprogramm die Wiederherstellung und prächtige Ausschmückung des Ekur, des Enlil-Heiligtums, in Nippur in Angriff genommen hatte.[36] Geschickt verband man historisch verbürgte Ereignisse, wie die Aufstandsbewegung gegen den König zu Beginn seiner Regierungszeit und die späteren Gutäer-Einfälle, mit einer (angeblichen) Verfehlung des Narām-Sîn gegen Enlil und damit gegen den sumerischen Süden Mesopotamiens.

Hintergrund der hier deutlich werdenden, allerdings keinesfalls für die gesamte spätere Narām-Sîn-Überlieferung geltende[37] pejorative Sicht auf den König war wohl eine gegen das akkadische Königtum gerichtete Haltung der Enlil-Priesterschaft in Nippur spätestens seit der Zeit der III. Dynastie von Ur (21. Jahrhundert v. Chr.).[38] In ihrer „politischen Tendenzschrift“[39] kennzeichneten die Verfasser den König von Akkade als „Unheilsherrscher“, der sozusagen paradigmatisch für den Untergang eines Reiches stand.[40] Für die Priester bedeutete das akkadische Königtum mit seinen spezifischen kultisch-religiösen Implikationen eine Fremdbestimmung, und zwar auch in der Rückschau, ergänzt durch die gleichfalls als Bedrückung empfundenen und verinnerlichten Wirkungen der konkurrierenden Wirtschaftsmacht der königlichen Domänen in Babylonien.[41]

[36] Vgl. dazu (mit Literatur) zuletzt Neumann 2018: 46.

[37] Vgl. dazu bereits Cooper 1983: 16 f.; vgl. auch Glassner 1986: 77–85; Schaudig 2012: 426 f.

[38] Vier Fragmente der Dichtung sind Ur III-zeitlich; vgl. dazu Wilcke 2015: 38–41. Nach Cavigneaux 2015: 320 „dürfte“ die Dichtung „frühestens gegen Ende der Akkade-Dynastie entstanden sein, vielleicht etwas später“.

[39] Vgl. dazu etwa Wilcke 1974: 63 f.; Wilcke 1982: 48 Anm. 19; Attinger 2020: 44.

[40] In der diesbezüglichen Omentradition (vgl. dazu zuletzt ausführlich Foster 2016: 252–262) standen die Person und die Regierung des Königs Šarkališarrī paradigmatisch für den Untergang eines Reiches, was der historischen Realität ja durchaus näher kommt; vgl. Glassner 2000: 385.

[41] Vgl. Neumann 2018: 47 mit Anm. 71 (Literatur); vgl. im vorliegenden Zusammenhang auch die Überlegungen bei Schrakamp 2017: 86 f.; Gerstenberger 2018: 101–106; Steinkeller 2017: 80.

Im Prozess des Niedergangs des Reiches von Akkade kamen also innere wie äußere Faktoren zur Wirkung, die sich teilweise gegenseitig bedingten. Die herrschende Dynastie hatte es letztlich nicht vermocht, den Gegensatz zwischen Königtum und alter Stadtstaaten- und Tempelaristokratie aufzulösen. Die traditionellen politischen, wirtschaftlichen und kultisch-religiösen Strukturen waren offensichtlich nicht in das neue Herrschaftssystem integriert worden, sondern bildeten in Konkurrenz zur königlichen Domänenwirtschaft und Militärpräsenz die Basis für das oppositionelle und partikularistische Agieren insbesondere der südmesopotamischen Provinzial- und Tempelaristokratie. Die religiöse Überhöhung des akkadischen Königtums, seine Eingriffe in traditionelle kultische Belange und folgenreiche Bodenenteignungen verschärften den latenten Gegensatz zwischen Zentralmacht und Provinzialaristokratie. Hinzu kamen innerdynastische Probleme, die zu einer Schwächung der Zentralgewalt beitrugen. Dies alles erleichterte es äußeren Kräften, insbesondere den nach Mesopotamien vordringenden Gutäern, den Staat von Akkade militärisch erfolgreich zu attackieren und letztlich zu besiegen.

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The Decline of the Ur III Dynasty: The End of an Empire and Its Afterlife in the Collective Memory of Mesopotamian Societies

Martin Lang

1 Prolegomena: Pre-history[1]

At the end of the 3rd mill. BC, according to the middle chronology (MC) from 2110 to 2003 BCE, we observe a growth of the local power of the city state of Ur in Southern Babylonia—it is exactly the city that is named in the bible (Gen 11,27) as Abraham's native city—to a more and more hegemonic power and the center of an expanding areal state. Its rise is connected with a specific person, the founder of the dynasty, a certain Ur-Namma of Uruk. Presumably, he was a brother of Utu-Heĝal, the ruler of Uruk and a high military in his army.[2] We do not know too much about Ur-Namma, a concise presentation of the history of this influential ruler is impossible, and his picture remains opaque,[3] and is primarily represented by means of (later) literary sources.[4] A famous Sumerian literary

[1]I owe thanks to Marcos Such Gutierrez, Sebastian Fink, Robert Rollinger and Ingo Schrakamp for their precious discussions and remarks on a complex topic. Of course, for the content of this contribution I am responsible alone. Sebastian Fink's contribution on the topic (Fink 2021) was unfortunately only published in the course of the printing process of this paper.

[2]Nissen (2012: 86–87); Van de Mieroop (2007: 75–77); Flückiger-Hawker (1999: 1–11) All year numbers given follow the middle chronology (MC); See recently Sallaberger and Schrakamp (2015, 131).

[3]See most recently Sallaberger (2015: 422–431).

[4]Dahl (2007: 13–14).

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composition "The death of Ur-Namma"[5] in at least two recensions tells about his early and tragic death and his descent into the Netherworld. However, the emergence and the rise of the state of the 3rd dynasty of Ur (Ur III) is a product of the reunification of Babylonian local rules after the end of the empire of Agade and its fragmentation and a rather dark intermediary age, the Gutean interlude,[6] and that seems to be Ur-Namma's merit. The dynasty's modern Name—Ur III—derives from an important literary work, the so-called Sumerian king-list, which is a fictional construction of a linearly continuing "chronique de la monarchie une" (J.-J. Glassner), a "chronicle of the *one* [Sumerian] kingship".[7] It is a "composition halfway between a literary text and a list proper, which deals with the history of kingship in Babylonia from the beginning of time to the early centuries of the second millennium BC".[8] As such it has been, in spite of its fictional character, formative for the understanding of Mesopotamian kingship. According to this source, kingdom, originally having descended from heaven, passed to the city of Ur for the third time. The idea that kingship changes from one dynasty to the next (and not vice versa) according to a predetermined time-plan,[9] together with this fictional succession of dynasties in one area, can be seen as a *translatio imperii*-idea in the cradle. Clearly, the sober list is flanked by explanations in other literary works, as will be shown below. Nevertheless, the "iconic representation"[10] of this succession pattern is this very list.

2 The Ur III State: An Empire?

Whether the rule of the Ur III dynasty was an empire is a matter of perspective and definition. Not only according to recent research[11] its imperial structures have clearly been recognized.[12] It fulfils almost all criteria in order to speak about an empire: expansion, multiethnicity, military strength, growing bureaucracy, flexible borders or broad border zones—and, very important—a sophisticated ideological and propagandistic foundation or superstructure respectively. Its hegemonic, or even imperial power did not only subdue the

[5] Flückiger-Hawker (1999).

[6] Sallaberger and Schrakamp (2015: 113–130); Steinkeller (2015).

[7] Krecher (1978: 138).

[8] Marchesi (2010: 231).

[9] The historical and theological concept is tightly connected with the term bala = *palû*—"rotation, turn, reign, a specific time span of reign, term of office". This bala is the predetermined time-span that cannot be altered. Cp. Samet (2014: 21); Galter (2006: 282–283).

[10] Adams (2009: 1).

[11] Cp. basically for the definition of an empire: Gehler and Rollinger (2014); and *ad rem* Neumann (2014).

[12] Cp. recently Neumann (2014: esp. 40–47), with bibliography; Garfinkle (2013: esp. 162–163), reluctantly asks for "State formation in Early Mesopotamia: The question of Empire" from an economical perspective.

Babylonian city states, but also expanded its area of influence to the North and the regions in the east of the Tigris during Ur-Namma's reign. After his conquests of Elam and Anshan even the capital of the Elamite state, Susa,[13] in the southwest of today's Iran[14] was under military control of this growing areal state. Under Šulgi,[15] Ur-Namma's son's 48 year's rule, frequent military campaigns towards the eastern and north-eastern mountain ranges are attested.[16] This phase casually, and possibly a little bit too enthusiastically, was denoted as "*pax sumerica*",[17] and we observe something like a peripety, as the extension of the rule reaches its peak, when "his empire included Mesopotamia up to Assur in the north to the Shemshara plain in the northeast, and to Susiana in the southeast".[18] Yet, as we can say ex post, simultaneously it begins to reveal its first signs of fragility.

Ur extended its power by means of military strength,[19] but also of marriage politics,[20] and a centralized bureaucracy.[21] The founder Ur-Namma and empire builder Šulgi established a provincial taxation system,[22] and had a sophisticated communication network developed. Ur-Namma pursued measures of central legislation—unification of law can be seen as a conscious and targeted act of state- and empire-building. His famous "law code"[23] seems to be a trendsetter concerning the compilation and promulgation of a law collection about 300 years before Hammurapi.[24]

[13] Marchesi (2013); De Graef (2015); Sallaberger and Schrakamp (2015: 124–125 and 131).

[14] For the historical Geography of the Iran cp. Schrakamp (In press). I am grateful to Ingo Schrakamp for having allowed me to look at his work.

[15] Dahl (2007: 17–20).

[16] Sallaberger (1999: 156). "Die rasche Abfolge von Feldzügen in dasselbe Gebiet zeigt, dass es sich nicht um Vernichtungskriege handeln kann, sondern Beutezüge, um Menschen, Tiere, Metalle und Steine zu erbeuten, wie dies zeitgenössische Quellen bestätigen".

[17] Edzard (2004: 5); For the concept of *pax* in imperial contexts see Gehler and Rollinger (2014: 20).

[18] Sallaberger and Schrakamp (2015: 131).

[19] The scarce attestation of the organisation and the supply of the army via documentary sources strangely contradicts its importance for the expansion of the empire. Cp. basically Lafont (2008, 2009).

[20] For the political marriages see Weiershäuser (2008: 260–269); Sallaberger (1999: 159–161).

[21] The secondary literature concerning the bureaucratic organisation of Ur III is vast. The degree of an efficient centralized bureaucracy, as well as the centralization itself has recently been discussed and challenged, Garfinkle (2013); Ingo Schrakamp writes: "Trotz wiederholter, schrittweise durchgeführter Maßnahmen zur Zentralisierung auf wirtschaftlicher, administrativer, religiöser und ideologischer Ebene gelang es den Ur III-Herrschern nie, eine zentralistische Bürokratie aufzubauen, so dass gegen Ende der Ur III-Zeit lokale Eliten funktionstüchtige politische Einheiten in den Grenzen der alten Stadtstaaten in die Unabhängigkeit führen konnten". Schrakamp (2010: 152).

[22] Sharlach (2004).

[23] Wilcke (2002); Civil (2011).

[24] Lang (2008: 50–51).

The core area of this areal state—or even empire—was smaller than that of the empire of Agade.[25] Its spheres of influence, be it by means of military raids, or be it the international connections via diplomacy,[26] economical exchange and trade seem to have the same range. So, the contacts with the southern districts of the Arabian peninsula and with the river cultures of India are attested by archaeological and epigraphical sources.[27] The third dynasty of Ur counts 5 kings. For the focus of this conference, the reign of the last king, Ibbi Su'en (MC 2026–2003 BCE) will be the most important.

2.1 The Story of the Decline of Ur III and Its Historical Problems

Since at least the middle of the twentieth century we have a standard narrative about the collapse of our empire.[28] As such it has encroached into our history books and it was—as far as I can see—only slightly altered by the respective historians according to their individual weighting of their sources, be it more connected to economical perspectives or be it emphasizing the literary references on the doom of the empire.

The decline of Ur III, beginning at least with some signs already under the reign of Ibbi-Su'en's predecessor, Šu-Su'en (2035–2027 MC), but advancing rapidly under Ibbi-Su'en, cannot be explained[29] with only one reason, and we are and will be far away from a satisfying solution. As far as we can see, it was caused by internal troubles such as revolts especially in north eastern regions accompanied and interconnected with ethnogenetic processes and the—according to certain sources—foudroyant rise of members of originally non-sedentary and non-indigene tribes (Amorites) to power.[30] Further, famine and dearth, salinization of the southern regions,[31] and external, but final impacts like invasions from the East contributed to the rapid decomposition of the state.

The decline of Ur III very recently has been designed as "disintegration".[32] The pillars of a *narrative* of the Ur III state, be it ancient, be it modern, are movements / invasions of seminomadic Amorite tribes[33] and the efforts to keep them away by means of wall buildings.[34] Further parameters are environmental catastrophes and harvest failures, and

[25] Lafont (2009: 2).

[26] Sharlach (2005).

[27] McIntosh (2008: esp. 182–191); Maekawa and Mori (2011); Steinkeller (2013); Laursen and Steinkeller (2017: esp. 47–62 and 82–88).

[28] Jacobsen (1953); Wilcke (1970); Edzard (1998: 149–152).

[29] For a detailed analysis of Ibbi-Sîn's disaster. Schaudig (2019).

[30] The literature on this topic is vast. See recently Michalowski (2011a: 82–121).

[31] For a critical statement on this see Michalowski (2011a: 173–175).

[32] Sallaberger and Schrakamp (2015: 131).

[33] Buccellati (1966); Wilcke (1969); Wossink (2009: 119–137); Michalowski (2011a: 82–121).

[34] Silver (2016: esp. 276–279); Sallaberger (1999: 159, 2009).

the "rise of bloated bureaucracy".[35] More recently the lack of grain in the south was tried to be explained by a change of the river bed of the Tigris.[36]

Ibbi-Su'en's reign ended with the final blow exerted by the Elamites under their Shimashkian ruler Kindattu in 2003 BCE.[37] These internal and external components with varying apportionings of the respective ingredients form a historical narrative of this last quarter of a century of the Ur III empire.

There seems to be one broad common sense in the research that the end of the dynasty must have been a dramatic and a traumatic event in the history of Mesopotamia. But just in view to the heuristic intents and questions formulated in the exposé of the present conference I should ask, whether this was justified and whether it was true. Rather, I should ask, whether the drama of the historical moments is a projection and a construction that emerges in a later stage in history, but, of its own, it remains formative for the collective memory of the Mesopotamian societies.

2.2 Sources and Source-Criticism

The sources that provide us with knowledge about these processes are, on the one hand the uncountable documentary sources and their decreasing number and their disappearance and the end of archives having already begun in Ibbi-Su'ens 2nd regnal year.[38]The flow of tax contributions from the eastern periphery to the center was interrupted in the same year, but had already been disturbed at the end of Šū-Sîn's reign.[39] Even Puzriš-Dagan, the seat of the state's central livestock agency ceased its activities. This successively dimming out of documentary sources traditionally serves as an indirect attestation of decline. Further, as fragments transporting a historical narrative, we have royal letters that got part of the school curriculum and whose historical value is a matter of discussion (I will soon refer on this more detailed). On the other hand, our source is literature in the shape of lamentations about the fall of cities. They contain statements about destruction, abandonment and absence of the divine, and search for theological constructions in order to explain the decline ex post.

Parameters

The decline of this "short-time empire"[40] is more or less explained by following parameters:

[35] Cp. Michalowski (2011a: 171).

[36] Sallaberger (1999: 177 with references).

[37] Potts (1999: 142–145); Sallaberger and Schrakamp (2015: 24–25).

[38] Lafont (1995); Sallaberger (1999: 174–175); Frayne (1997: 366).

[39] Potts (1994: 134).

[40] For a discussion of this term and its application to the empire of Ur III see below.

– Materially via the ending of archives and the fading and the disappearance of dated texts beginning in the more peripheric areas but as a centripetal movement in the later phase even in the Mesopotamian alluvial plain.[41]
– The extant year names of Ibbi-Su'en's reign show military activities mainly oriented to the east, in which Ibbi-Su'en was more the driven than the driving.

Literary sources tell us about activities of the Amorites in the north-east of the region and the career and the following putsch of the General Išbi-Erra from Mari, who finally establishes his reign at Isin. Lack of grain compels Ibbi-Su'en to enter into negotiations with Išbi-Erra, his dangerous counterpart. Secondary evidence from documentary sources from the years IS 8, 9 and 13 seem to support this.

This lack of grain is attested via documentary sources. It lead to a strong increase of prices,[42] grain as concentrated feed was replaced by green reed, and the wages for workers were not payed in grain products but in oil and dates.[43]

However, when I remarked at the beginning, that the pillars of a modern narrative of the decline of Ur III are shaped by parameters as invasions of seminomadic Amorite tribes, environmental catastrophes and harvest failures, and the rise of bloated bureaucracy, so we have to take into account that this very image of this period derives from a group of sources that, at least comes from a later period and very probably mirrors a certain imagination of history that does not coincide with the actual historical events.[44]

Royal Inscriptions and Royal Hymns

Royal inscriptions[45] are designed for the public display and they serve in order to present the glorious *res gestae* of the respective ruler. In *royal inscriptions* and the panegyric *royal hymns* there is no space for defeats and loss, nevertheless specially the former serve as a backbone of a political history[46] and give information about the extension of the domain, be it real, be it claimed ideally.[47] The content of both are the warlike actions, the activities as the *roi bâtisseur*, and the care for the land. The legitimizing base in both genres is the election and the bringing up of the king by the gods. *Royal inscriptions* normally are shaped rather formally, the hymns as literary works are, let me say, poetic works. For our question, only the hymns of Išbi-Erra, the second of the *dramatis personae*, Ibbi-Su'en's antagonist, are important for a historical evaluation.[48] Especially the hymn Išbi-Erra G can

[41] Lafont (1995); Sallaberger (1999: 174); Sallaberger and Schrakamp (2015: 131–133).
[42] Jacobsen (1953: 38); Gomi (1984); Frayne (1997: 366); Lafont (1995: 89–90).
[43] Cp. Sallaberger (1999: 174).
[44] Cp. Michalowski (2011b: 19–20).
[45] Frayne (1997).
[46] Cp. Marchesi (2013).
[47] For the case of the fate of Ur cp. Glassner (2000: 389).
[48] Van Dijk (1978); Vanstiphout (1989–90); Michalowski (2011a: 171 and 195).

provide us with information of a certain historical relevance, as it is the first text to mention Išbi-Erra as a man whom chose the gods from Mari to be king.[49]

Documentary Sources

The ensemble of the written sources of the 3rd millennium mainly comprises the tens of thousands economic, administrative and legal texts. They can enlarge and refine our image by very detailed small hints at certain locations via the mentioning of toponyms or distances, or via onomastic data, and, like a small piece of a puzzle, this information can link two or more clusters of information hitherto disconnected, and sharpen the general view. As such they "become a primary historical source by the notation of a year date, which refers to a specific ruler".[50] As one system of year counting by means of year names is important for our chronological framework.

Year Names

Year names as a device of dating do not only serve as "an essential source for any enquiry into military history",[51] but also for the examination of historical events and the development of processes. They are formally "a sentence or a group of sentences, normally placed at the end of the tablet", mostly refer to deeds performed by the ruler: restoration of temples, cultic activities, and, of course mention the *result* of military campaigns, i.e. the defeat or destruction of a foreign territory or city. Year names can be conceived as "short royal inscriptions conveying political propaganda but, then as now, political propaganda is not expected to express true facts."[52]

Royal Correspondence

The extant sources from later times referring to and processing the cluster of events are a group of royal letters,[53] that were handed down and occasionally copied in the school milieu. The series of 24 preserved letters document the written communication of Ur III kings and their magnates about different problems connected to the *ars regendi*. The problems are by no means academic, rather they seem "true" and "topical", as they touch infrastructural measures, quests of disloyalty, organisation of supply and matters of military security. There have been hard debates, whether these letters mirror a "true", contemporary picture[54] of the events or whether they feature a fictional or even

[49] ^{d}iš-bi-er$_3$-ra lugal kalam-ma-⌜še$_3$⌝ ma$_2$-ri$_2^{ki}$-ta mu-[un-suḫ-eš] (IE G, l. 11'), Michalowski (2005: 203–204).

[50] Sallaberger and Schrakamp (2015: 33).

[51] Lafont (2009: 1).

[52] Such-Gutiérrez (2020).

[53] See now Piotr Michalowski's *opus magnum*, the edition and abundant annotation. Michalowski (2011a).

[54] Hallo (2006).

"pseudepigraphic" character.[55] Four of these letters insinuate to reflect situations of Ibbi Sîn's reign, two of them are epistolary exchanges between him and his emerging adversary, Išbi-Erra.[56]

Our main problem is, that we have no contemporary manuscript, all extant 115 manuscripts of these letters are from about 1800 BCE, and, regardless of complicated redaction history, even the grammar, onomastics and historical anachronisms hint to a later date of origin.[57] Nevertheless these sources reveal a highly developed historical awareness[58] and a high quality of historiography and historical writing within the institutional framework of the Old Babylonian school.

City Laments

Additionally, we have a couple of so-called city laments,[59] a group of literary, or even poetical texts that refer to the destruction and desolation of a city and its surrounding landscape. The destruction advances from an imagined periphery, overwhelms all institutions of social life: family, economy, rulership, and, finally the vital core of a city, that is its sanctuaries with a living cult. As a consequence, the gods leave their temples, and death and chaos remains. The poetic reference to the catastrophe is a means of theological reasoning. The agents in these texts are of divine nature. It is a divine resolution that makes an end to the kingship of Ur and makes it passing to another location. For our question only two of the literary Sumerian city laments are relevant, the lamentation over the destruction of Ur,[60] and the lamentation over Sumer and Ur.[61]

Historical Omina

The Mesopotamian societies created sophisticated techniques of predicting the future. Their diagnoses and interpretations of signs, be it chthonic, be it celestial, were compiled and written down in long lists and treated as objects of scholarship and science.[62] So, in some compendia of these collected omina,[63] we do not only have certain signs in the protaseis which indicate events to come in the apodosis, but we have allusions to the past,

[55] Michalowski (2011b: 20); Huber (2001).

[56] Michalowski (2011b: 185–187).

[57] Huber (2001).

[58] The lack of grain attested by archival sources cp. Gomi (1984) mentioned in letter 21 seems not to be an invention of scholars, but possibly to hint to a knowledge of archival sources that are inweaved into the historizing but fictionary framework of the story of the royal letters.

[59] Until nowadays five city laments, partly already attested in ancient literary catalogues, are known: The Lament over Ur, The Lament over Sumer and Ur, The Lament over Uruk, The Lament over Eridu, and The Lament over Nippur. Cp. recently Samet (2014: 3–5).

[60] Samet (2014).

[61] Michalowski (1989).

[62] Maul (2003: esp. 79–80); Maul (2013: passim).

[63] Reiner (1974); Cooper (1980); Michalowski (2011a: 212).

to specific historical events,[64] also to those of the end of the 3rd mill. BCE. Whether these references to past events were history or a fiction of history has been discussed since several decades. According to Erica Reiner it is not history we meet, but it is "Historiettes".[65]

3 Evaluation: The Reasons for the Collapse of Ur III: And the Quest for One More "Short-Term Empire"?

Very recent discussions about so-called "short-term" empires make the question arise whether the state of the third dynasty of Ur could be conceived as one of the many short-term empires during the course of history. This is congruous with certain tendencies in the research about the Ur III period which doubt a too optimistic view on the role of the bureaucracy.[66] Which factors, from a comparative perspective, could have turned a fulminant rise and a promising beginning into a political mayfly? As a heuristic lens the recent position fixing pursued by Robert Rollinger shall serve: Short-term empires were "very successful at the very beginning, like most empires are, this success is very ephemeral and transient. The era of conquest is never followed by a period of consolidation. Collapse and/or reduction to much smaller dimension run as fast as the process of wide-ranging conquest and expansion. In general, these states do only exist to a maximum of three generations, i.e. no longer than about 90 years, some of them collapse even considerably earlier."[67] Further, as components influencing the ephemerality of empires he distillates (by comparing many short-lived empires throughout the history) structural deficits (in view to organisation and administration), exaggerated exploitation of resources and people via extensive deportations, the erosion of loyalty in the peripheral regions, the role of the elites and—the role of circumstances and contingency.[68]

Almost all of these ingredients can be identified in the recent research that incorporated, more than earlier, the micro-information from the many administrative texts. Whether correct or not, recent publications in the scientific community raise considerable doubts about the degree of an efficient centralized bureaucracy.[69] Steve Garfinkle doubted that Ur III, even under Shulgi's reign, really had established "firm institutional foundations to provide stability" for statewide structures.[70] Seth Richardson, *inter alios*, diagnosed the end of Ur III not by a single catastrophe but "through a series of passive defections of

[64] Cp. Basically Goetze (1947); Reiner (1974); Cooper (1980). Examples will follow below.

[65] Reiner (1974: 261).

[66] See above, note 18.

[67] Rollinger et al. (2020).

[68] Rollinger et al. (2020).

[69] See above, note 18.

[70] Garfinkle (2013: 164).

individual provinces", a process which took about two decades and got visible by the use / abandonment of Ibbi-Sîn's year names.[71] It was Robert Adams who stated, that Ur III was a very short adventure and ended up for following reasons:

> To be sure, Ur III was aggressively successful as an empire for a half-century or so. But its effectiveness in that external respect heavily depended upon the onerous demands it made on the resources and labor of its subject peoples and subordinated allies, and on its continuing success in military campaigns against neighboring states. Massively extracting harvests, other resources, and corvée labor from what otherwise would have been self-supporting territories in order to enrich a rapidly growing dynastic establishment, underwrite heavy military (and home garrison) costs, and direct an endless flow of sacrifices and subsidies to a few favored cities and cult centers, it provided little reciprocal flow of central support to the provincial ration or allotment system and other needs. The basis of its initial success, in short, ultimately became the source of its vulnerability.[72]

3.1 Not an Abrupt End, but a Transformation?

Whether the recent opinions quoted are sufficient for an evaluation of the Ur III state as a short-term-empire is a matter of perspective. In sum, we have to reckon not with an abrupt end, but an erosion and a transformation. In Ibbi Su'ens 8th regnal year Išbi-Erra declared his independence and begun to build his own kingdom and to establish his own dynasty with its center at Isin.[73] Išbi-Erra's rise to and his final takeover of power can be evaluated as the success story of a military leader from the periphery according to patterns of formation of identities ("ethnogenesis") we know from the late Roman empire, and the rise of the military elites to power as a consequence of a complex interaction of center and periphery.[74] The loss of the Eastern provinces and the abruption of the stream of resources into the empire's heart must have deadly weakend the system,[75] and could have lead to a—I am inclined to use a medical term—"cachexia" of the empire.

As far as we know, this end was by no means one of burned earth, rather, there was a certain continuity in the following rule of the Isin dynasty which built its legitimation on the foundations laid by the kings of the third dynasty of Ur.

[71] Richardson (2008: 153).

[72] Adams (2009: §3.4).

[73] Lafont (1995: 10); Van de Mieroop (1987: 126); Potts (1994: 134–135).

[74] Pohl (2005: 13–38); Steinacher (2017: 23–31); Börm (2018: 177–183).

[75] Garfinkle (2013: 162–164); Dahl (2007: 30) by referring to the account text from Ur, UET 3, 1498.

4 The Afterlife of the Fall of Ur: Its Remembrance in the Collective Memory of Babylonia as a Scholarly Master Narrative

Often, the perception of empires in their historical perspective is formatively coined by later views on and valuations of them. A prominent example for this is the case of Ur III.

4.1 The Afterlife of an Empire's End in Historical Omina

The decline of the Ur III state is processed in different groups of texts and genres, and according to each species the perspective and the—let me say—causal research differs and leads to different results. So, in some historical omina[76] the references on the rulers of Ur III in these collections are a perspective on the end of UR III *after* the events, and they were not without any influence. So, Ibbi-Su'en and his opponent, Išbi-Erra are designed as jinx and as lucky devil.[77]

Ibbi Su'en's troubles with Elam and his captivity and traceless disappearance in the land of Anshan play an influential, historically significant role in these omen texts.[78] We even might designate these long time tradition of certain motive clusters as "topical". So, for Jean Glassner it is striking that

> Pour les astrologues du 1er millenaire, cependant, Ibbī-Sîn ne meurt pas mais est envoyé en exil à Anšan, sur le plateau iranien. Cet épilogue offre peut-être un précédent à la fin malheureuse de Nabonide auquel son vainqueur, le roi Cyrus, aurait offert la vie sauve en le nommant gouverneur de Carmanie.[79]

We do not really know, why these fictional historical references found their path into the tradition of the omen literature. Obviously some historical events, like the fall of Akkade or the end of the Ur III-Dynasty, or, at least, the perception of them were seen as paradigmatic historical signs for possible future events, which omina in general should show.

However, the existence of these historical omina clearly indicate that a certain memory of the fall—or fail—of the state was still present more than a millennium later. Its history,

[76] Reiner (1974); Starr (1977); Cooper (1980); Michalowski (2011a: 212–215); Glassner (1997, 2000); Maul (2013: esp. 210–213).

[77] From Mari about Ibbi-Su'en: *a-mu-ut ṣú-ḫa-ra-im si i-bi-*^{d}en.zu *ba-táq ma-ti-šu i-ba-al-ki-ti-šu*—"omen of the *diminishing (of the land)* pertaining to Ibbi-Sin, *the end of the country*, they[?] will rebel against him". Rutten (1938: no. 6); In an Old Babylonian omen collection one can read: *a-mu-ut, i-bi-*^{d}en.zu *ša ma-tum ip-ḫu-ru-nim* "omen of Ibbi-Sin, against whom the land gathered (in revolt)". *YOS* 10 36 i: 13–14 [Götze 1947: pl. 36]; A later tradition (*Šumma Izbu*) says about Išbi-Erra: *amūt* (ba-*ut*) *iš-bi-*^{d}*er-ra šá maḫira* (gaba.ri) *la* (nu) *irši* (tuk-⌜*ši*⌝)—"omen of Išbi-Erra who had no opponent". Leichty (1970: 83 l. 105).

[78] For the relevant omen texts see Glassner (2000: 389–390).

[79] Glassner (2000: 391).

i.e. its *imaginated* history serves as a matrix for the present ominous events to be interpreted. It does not matter whether the paradigmatic structures were true history, or not. It was a matter of interpretation of history as a sign itself.

4.2 The Afterlife of an Empire's End in Sumerian Literary Texts, Especially in Sumerian City Laments and Their Theological Reasoning

So, we encounter a long continuity of a special kind of memory. This continuity of the memory mainly has its origins at the court of Isin and its prolific literary production.[80] In view to the founder of the Isin dynasty, Išbi-Erra, and his court-poetry, Piotr Michalowski states:

> One cannot avoid the conclusion that this historiographic poetics must be intimately linked with the conscious construction of the image of the new Isin king, an image that was offered to contemporaries as well as to posterity.

Further sources (additionally to the historical omina we have just dealt with) emerging from and coining this afterlife are the above mentioned royal letters, the city laments and some royal hymns. These city laments, too, are to be seen as product of this afterlife, and as a means of a theopolitical reasoning. The most coining formulation about the end of the Ur III state is handed down to us in the lament over Sumer and Ur:

> di-til-la inim pu-uḫ$_2$-ru-um-ma-ka šu gi$_4$-gi$_4$ nu-ĝal$_2$
> inim dug$_4$-ga an ^{d}en-lil$_2$-la$_2$-ka šu bal-e nu-zu
> urim$_5^{ki}$-ma nam-lugal ḫa-ba-šum$_2$ bal da-ri$_2$ la-ba-an-šum$_2$
> ud ul kalam ki ĝar-ra-ta zag uĝ$_3$ lu-a-še$_3$
> bala nam-lugal-la saĝ-bi-še$_3$ e$_3$-a a-ba-a igi im-mi-in-du$_8$-a
> nam-lugal-bi bala-bi ba-gid$_2$-e-de$_3$ šag$_4$ kuš$_2$-u$_3$-de$_3$
>
> The judgment uttered by the assembly cannot be turned back,
> the word spoken by An and Enlil knows no overturning.
> Ur was indeed given kingship; but it was not given an eternal reign.
> From time immemorial, since the land was founded, until the population multiplied.
> Who has ever seen a reign of kingship that would take precedence (for ever)?
> The reign of its kingship has been long indeed, but had to exhaust itself.[81]

The end and its new beginning is a matter of fate, if we follow the text quoted, it is of divine origin, and the empire's history with its "appointed time of duration is a cosmic law that

[80] Michalowski (2005: 205).

[81] Lament over Sumer and Ur, lines 364–369, ed. and transl. Michalowski (1989: 58–59).

cannot be changed or resisted".[82] This concept of an "appointed time of duration" is implied by the Sumerian word bala.[83]

It seems to be a certain concept of history, a certain theology of history, or a historical theology that forms this view of the end of the Ur III-state. Simultaneously this ideology prepares the stage for the new rule of the Isin period. It celebrates the change as continuity and continuity as change, and creates legitimation. By constructing the end by means of literary and scholarly works, the new beginning is enclosed, and the rule of Isin celebrates itself as the legitimate heir. All these literary productions clearly postdate the events they describe. Their history-writing and their formative influence on the perception of the historical events—and the modern perception, too—*is* the afterlife.

5 Summary

We have two groups of sources or situations of sources: The first should show us, as contemporary sources, i.e. economic and administrative documents, how to understand the decline and the decomposition of the areal state of Ur III. They do not mention explicitly a decline, but we can see certain changes. That there could have been a decline at all is available to us thanks a second source group. It presents the existing ancient narrative about the decline. It contains literary references from later times, so it *is* the afterlife of this rule, and we have to read them with a certain heuristic grid: how did this afterlife perceive and explain this period of rule. Admittedly, keeping these two groups apart from each other is not very easy and depends from the dating of these sources. However, there are different views among historians.

Very recently, the rise of Išbi-Erra's power and the ongoing attacks from north and east were connected with the idea of secondary state formation caused by the many expeditions and raids by the Ur III Kings which in turn is based on the great demand of resources in a landscape with few natural resources.[84]

I have already adumbrated that the fall of the dynasty itself possibly could not have had the historical weight it had according to the evaluation by most of the modern historians, rather it seems to have had an important role in the eyes of the ancient scholars, historiographers—and we may call their activity "Frühformen historischen Denkens" according to Robert Rollinger's still unpublished dissertation. They acted as historians by rational reasoning, but with very specific interests and intents: they tried to argue that the fall of the empire and the change of rule had happened according to divine resolutions and

[82] Samet (2014: 21).

[83] Cp. the recent overview given in Fink (2021, esp. 16–25).

[84] I owe thanks to Sebastian Fink for having made possible a preview into his paper "Changes in Ur III border regions—a homemade Disaster?".

divine actions or according to a determined historical necessity.[85] We can evaluate it as an innovation inasmuch they connected *their* version of decline with the *logoi* of devastation from the genre of cultic lamentation,[86] less in order to bewail the past, but in order to celebrate the dynastic change and the new rule. This fate should prepare and legitimize the subsequent rule of the Isin dynasty as the legitimate heir of the kings of Ur.

As a historian of Ancient Near Eastern literature I would argue, that this very time after the "fall" of Ur III was one of the most productive and innovative periods of Sumerian literature. Surprisingly the theological and scholarly dramatization of this perspective of fall and decline—and we should not forget the restoration—supershapes the actual processes and strongly influences and coins the ancient and the modern perception of the historical events as a dramatical series of events. Maybe, it is this very perspective, that, at the one hand, beclouds more than it reveals, and at the other hand, it makes possible the view into the history at all.

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[85] See the lines from the Lament over Sumer and Ur quoted above.

[86] For the question, how the cultic laments and the literary city laments were related see recently. Samet (2014: 1–3).

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The Collapse of the Hittite Kingdom

Stefano de Martino

1 The Event

No Hittite document indicates the exact date of the collapse of the Hittite kingdom. Notwithstanding, the inscription of Ramesses III on the front of the second pylon in the Medinet Habu temple states that Ḫatti and its subordinated countries fell victim to the "Sea Peoples" in the 8th year of the reign of this pharaoh.

As is well known, there is no agreement concerning the years of Ramesses III's reign. E. H. Cline,[1] for example, argued that Ramesses III took power in 1184. His regnal years are listed as 1187–1157 in the *Handbook of Egyptian Chronology* edited by E. Hornung, R. Krauss, and D.A. Warburton.[2] Th. Schneider[3] preferred an earlier date and placed the beginning of Ramesses III's reign in the year 1195. Thus, the Medinet Habu inscriptions cannot be summoned to testify to the exact time when Ḫatti disappeared.

In the present essay I call Ḫattušili II the brother of Muwatalli II; he is also known as Ḫattušili III in the secondary literature. His son and follower was Tuṯḫaliya III, who is also called Tuṯḫaliya IV.

[1] Cline (2014).

[2] Hornung et al. (2006).

[3] Schneider (2010).

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Nevertheless, evidence coming from other archives, such as texts found in Ugarit and Emar, offers further indications concerning the last years of the Hittite kingdom, and support the assumption that Ḫatti actually collapsed in the second decade of the twelfth century BCE.[4]

As J. Seeher[5] demonstrated, the Hittite capital was abandoned and the official buildings were meticulously cleaned out.[6] We can exclude that the city was looted by enemies, because there are no traces of fighting; if the capital had been attacked or plundered, either smashed pottery or pieces fallen from the hands of the looters should have been found; besides, the domestic quarters were not burnt.[7] The only possible explanation is that the court moved to another place to which it transported all the temple inventories and precious goods.

Concerning the tablet collection discovered at Boğazköy, the scarcity of documents datable from the time of the last king, Šuppiluliuma II, may be explained by assuming that the most significant texts were moved to another place.[8]

After the court left Ḫattuša, occupation was reduced to small areas in the former Hittite city.[9] Some of the city gates were blocked, presumably because the inhabitants felt insecure and were no longer able to control the whole extent of the city walls.[10] A progressive impoverishment affected the city, as the production of ceramic artefacts clearly demonstrates; in fact, wheel made pottery was no longer produce, and only hand made vases were made.[11]

As far as Anatolia is concerned, some of the northern and central Anatolian sites that belonged to the Hittite kingdom were attacked and destroyed, and we assume that the Kaška tribes may have been responsible for some of these attacks. Elsewhere, the events related to the fall of Ḫatti affected less dramatically the centres at the west and south of Ḫattuša, such as Yassıhöyük and Kaman-Kalehöyük. Lastly, quite all the sites located on the coast of Anatolia and Syria were destroyed and abandoned.[12]

The breakdown of the Hittite central system of control determined the fragmentation of the kingdom into smaller polities, and the complete disappearance of the Hittite language as well as cuneiform writing.

[4] See de Martino (2018).

[5] Seeher (1988).

[6] See Schachner (2011: 112–113); Genz (2013).

[7] See Genz (2013).

[8] See Bemporad (2006: 74); Klinger (2015: 99).

[9] See Kealhofer et al. (2009); Seeher (2018: 89–90).

[10] See Seeher (1988); Genz (2013: 471).

[11] See Genz (2003, 2004); Kealhofer et al. (2009).

[12] See de Martino (2018) with bibliographical references; see also here Sect. 2.3.

2 The Possible Causal Factors of the Collapse

2.1 The Lack of Labour Forces

Hittite historiographical texts document that the Hittite kings plundered the conquered countries and not only looted precious goods, but also deported many civil prisoners.[13] The deportees were a precious resource and could be settled in different regions of Anatolia, largely in sparsely inhabited territories where they worked on farms as peasants and shepherds.[14] Furthermore, deportees were presumably employed on the large estates owed by institutions and wealthy families.[15] Though we do not have at our disposal an in depth analysis on the extent of the royal and private estates in relation to the small farms, the existence of enormous properties is certainly documented, as in the case of the estate that Prince Šaḫurunuwa left to his heir, as is witnessed in the decree issued by Tutḫaliya III.[16] One may also cite the huge donations given to institutions by Muršili III and Ḫattušili II.[17]

Šuppiluliuma I related that he deported 3300 prisoners from Karkemiš and transferred them to his personal estate; even more people were taken by his generals.[18] In addition, his successor Muršili II boasted to have transferred 66,000 deportees from western Anatolia.[19] Even if we make allowance for exaggerations in the accounts of these two kings, it is indeed possible that many deportees were actually captured by the Hittites.

Despite this, a persistent lack of man-power affected the Hittite kingdom mostly after the terrible epidemic that killed many people during the reign of Šuppiluliuma I,[20] and the availability of labour forces presumably became even more limited, when the Hittites did no more led their army against the bordering countries. Hence, one may argue that the definitive conquest of Syria and Western Anatolia as well as the relative political stability in these regions deprived the Hittite kings of one of their main economic resources.

The tributes given by the subordinated rulers were indeed significant sources of precious metals and goods, but the deportees and the livestock looted by Šuppiluliuma I and Muršili II better assured the food-production necessary for the life of the country.

Besides, in the thirteenth century B.C.E. the Hittite army was no longer engaged in expeditions of conquest but instead had to wage two defensive battles, with Egypt at Qadeš, and with Assyria at Niḫriya. The Hittites suffered significant losses in both struggles and,

[13] See Klinger (2018).

[14] See Imparati (1987); Bryce (2002: 100 and 104–107); Cammarosano (2018: 271–275).

[15] See Klengel (2006: 6).

[16] See Imparati (1974).

[17] See de Martino (2017).

[18] See del Monte (2008: 116–117).

[19] See del Monte (1993: 66–67); Klinger (2018).

[20] See the plague prayers of Muršili II. Singer (2002).

though the result of the Qadeš battle was favourable to the Hittites, they did not carry away any loot, since they only protected their subordinated polities in Syria.

In addition, the internal conflict between Muršili III / Urḫi-Teššob and his uncle Ḫattušili also exacted a high cost in human lives when the army of Ḫattušili fought against that of his nephew, the legitimate king.[21]

The last kings of the Hittite dynasty were aware of the difficult economic situation of their time; the hieroglyphic Luwian inscription from Yalburt relates a military expedition led by Tutḫaliya III in the region of Lukka,[22] and the Hittite king boasted about the huge booty that he carried off from the raided countries. Furthermore, the two Hittite military expeditions led by Šuppiluliuma II[23] against Alašiya presumably had the same purpose.[24] I. Singer[25] argued that the Hittite expedition aimed to stop the arrivals of newcomers; instead, I assume that the Hittite king aimed to gain booty, and KBo 12.38 indeed mentions the rich tribute that the ruler of Alašiya had to give to Ḫatti.[26] I also assume that the Hittite conquest of Alašiya became necessary because the crisis of the Mycenaean polities and the presence of the "Sea Peoples" in the Mediterranean regions had drastically changed the rules of business, and palaces no longer controlled the trade in copper and other precious goods.[27]

2.2 Shortage of Food

Climate and environmental changes have often been considered as to be the primary drivers of the political and economic crisis that affected some regions in the Eastern Mediterranean at the end of the Late Bronze Age, but this assumption is not universally accepted. Since A.B. Knapp and St. W. Manning[28] have accurately reviewed the most significant and recent publications on this topic, I will limit myself here to summarizing some key points.

Davis Kaniewski and his team investigated in depth whether climate and environmental changes actually occurred in Anatolia and Syria at the end of the Late Bronze Age; they

[21] See Yoffee (2010: 192); Concerning the costs of the civil war between Assyria and Babylonia at the end of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Furthermore, Muršili III seems to have also dissipated a huge amount of wealth in the form of generous donations to cult institutions and members of the aristocracy, with the aim of acquiring the protection of the gods and the support of the nobles against his uncle, who was trying to remove him from the throne, see de Martino (2017).

[22] See Poetto (1993); Hawkins (1995: 66–85).

[23] The first of these two expeditions was presumably conducted by Šuppiluliuma, during the reign of his father, King Tutḫaliya III, see Bemporad (2014).

[24] See Güterbock (1967); Bemporad (2014).

[25] Singer (2000).

[26] See Singer and Gestoso-Singer (2014).

[27] See Sherratt (1998).

[28] Knapp and Manning (2016).

reached the conclusion that there was a shift to a more arid climate, which indeed was the ultimate cause of economic crisis and the collapse of several Near Eastern societies.[29] Nevertheless, correlating archaeological and historical evidence with the results of scientific analyses is a difficult task. The main problem consists in the lack of "high-resolution information", which could be connected to either political events or archaeological data that may be correlated with the exact chronology of the detected climate changes.[30] We can only state that "based on a series of proxy indicators, there is clearly some sort of shift to cooler and arid instable conditions generally between the 13th century and the 10th century B.C.E., but not necessarily any one key <<episode>>".[31]

Furthermore, Kuzucuoğlu[32] argued that the climate was dry during the whole second millennium B.C.E., but Anatolian societies were able to successfully resist such climatic conditions for centuries; in fact, the Hittite kingdom was a long-lasting political entity that flourished for more than 450 years in an environmental situation that presumably was not much different from that of the Middle Bronze Age, thus showing a high level of adaptability to unfavourable conditions.[33]

The limits of Hittite agricultural resources and the necessity of feeding the people living in and around Ḫattuša led the rulers of Ḫatti to invest resources in the construction of large grain-storage complexes. One of these lies in Ḫattuša, close to the "postern wall", and dates from the sixteenth century B.C.E. Silo pits, datable from the thirteenth century B.C.E., have been found at Büyükkaya, in the north-eastern area of Ḫattuša. Granaries had also been built in other Hittite cities, such as the huge silo in Šarišša (Kuşaklı), which dates from the sixteenth century B.C.E.[34]

The Hittite kings also sponsored the building of water reservoirs, ponds, and dams in Ḫattuša, and in other regions of Anatolia as well, in order to assure the availability of water throughout the year. Water management seems to have been one of the most significant duties of the Hittite sovereigns. The oldest water facilities date from the sixteenth century B.C.E., whereas the most recent are the work of the last Hittite kings and date from the late thirteenth century B.C.E.[35]

Since some Hittite water supplies precede the period immediately before the collapse of the Hittite kingdom, one cannot assume that a state of emergency, due to a period of below-average precipitation during the last decades of the thirteenth century B.C.E., obliged the last kings of the Hittite dynasty to engage in more intensive activity in this sector.

[29] See Kaniewski et al. (2015).

[30] See Knapp and Manning (2016: 113–118).

[31] Knapp and Manning (2016: 137).

[32] See Kuzucuoğlu (2015: 32).

[33] See Roberts (2017).

[34] See Seeher (2007); Dörfler et al. (2011: 108–113); Schachner (2011: 234–242).

[35] See Hüser (2007); Schachner (2011: 227–234, 2012); Schachner and Wittenberg 2012.

Despite the Hittite effort to prevent the consequences of periods of drought, it is indubitable that the political, administrative, and military complexity of the Hittite kingdom called for high levels of extraction of natural resources, which presumably led to a continual and cumulative "over-stressing" of the Anatolian environment.[36]

The assumption that dramatic climate changes affected Anatolia during the thirteenth century B.C.E. was often supported by quoting some Hittite and Ugaritic texts.[37] Nevertheless, I argue that the Hittite written evidence does not give clue in support of said assumption and only documents the difficulty of acquiring cereals from Syria and Egypt,[38] since the water routes in the Eastern Mediterranean were no longer safe and the shipping of valuable goods from Egypt to Syria and from Syria to Anatolia had become a risk. Hence, the shortage of food may have been one of the stressors of the Hittite administrative system, but not the main cause of the collapse and fall of Ḫatti.

2.3 Movements of Peoples

Hittite and Ugaritic tablets document the presence of sea raiders, who caused considerable unrest among the population of Ugarit and attacked the coastal cities. These texts as well as all the other sources on the "Sea Peoples" have already been examined in depth by several researchers,[39] hence a further presentation is not necessary here.[40]

The aforementioned inscription of Ramesses III on the front of the second pylon in the Medinet Habu temple provides only very imprecise information about the countries from which these tribes came. The Egyptian sources, despite the fact that their authors seem not to have a clear idea of the origin of their enemies, always stress the strict alliance that these tribes had concluded among themselves by forming a threatening coalition. Their impact on the Near Eastern countries is presented as a disastrous event, to the point where "no land could stand before their arms" and Hatti, Qadeš, Karkemiš, Arzawa, and Alašiya were annihilated.[41]

The crisis that affected many of the Mycenaean polities at the end of the thirteenth century B.C.E.[42] created a situation of profound social and economic instability; hence, it is understandable that several push and pull factors led groups of different social conditions to leave their homeland and look for better conditions of life.[43] The routes that these groups

[36] See Roberts (2017); Schachner (2017).

[37] See Klengel (1974); Singer (1999: 715–719); Yakar (2006); Divon (2008); Cline (2014: 142–147).

[38] See de Martino (2018).

[39] See Yon (1989); Singer (1999: 719–722); Gilan (2013); Knapp and Manning (2016).

[40] See de Martino (2018), for a review of the most recent literature on the "Sea Peoples".

[41] See Redford (2018).

[42] See French (2009); Middelton (2010); Wiener (2014).

[43] See Betancourt (2000).

may have taken to the Eastern Mediterranean region are not linear, and the newcomers may have arrived not only from Greece, but also from the Aegean islands and Western Anatolia, by following both sea and land routes.[44]

Moving on to the Hittite and Ugaritic sources, only four "Sea Peoples" are documented in these texts, namely the Lukka, Šikila, Equesh/Aḫḫiyawa, and Peleset peoples,[45] but The Hittite sources do not give exhaustive information on the "Sea Peoples". We can only infer that a situation of general instability allowed raiders, mercenaries, and fortune-hunters to reach the coastal regions of southern Anatolia and Syria, and, eventually, to settle there.

Furthermore, the Hittite evidence seems to rule out the possibility that Anatolia was at the centre of a mass migration of peoples. Nevertheless, it is unquestionable that even small groups of newcomers may have caused damage and distress among the local communities. We are unable to say whether these peoples were responsible for the destruction of the Anatolian and Syrian coastal sites,[46] and thus contributed to the fall of Ḫatti, or, instead, profited from the power vacuum left by the collapse of the Hittite kingdom.[47]

2.4 The Broken Political and Social Network

The stability of Ḫatti depended on the Hittite king's ability to impose his will and power over all the countries he dominated and, at the same time, to restrict to a manageable level the resistance that the subordinated polities posed to the central authority.[48]

The overwhelming military superiority of the Hittite army in comparison to the militia of each subordinated country was a "convincing" argument in favour of loyalty to the sovereigns of Ḫatti. In addition, the protection that the Hittite overlord extended to all the polities and members of the kingdom was sometimes necessary, mainly when one of the other Great Kings became a menace; hence, loyalty to the king of Ḫatti was the only possible choice for a small polity.

The Hittites used violence and intimidation, as well as mercy and indulgence, in order to maintain control over the subordinated polities,[49] but on some occasions the overlords were inflexible, as in the case of the deposition of Bentešina, king of Amurru, after the battle of Qadeš.[50]

[44] See Mountjoy (2015).

[45] See Adams and Cohen (2013); Redford (2018: 113–114); de Martino (2018).

[46] See for example, Yon (1989); Singer (2000); Whittaker (2017).

[47] As noted above, Singer (2017: 623) and Forlanini (2017: 139) argued that Kizzuwatna was no longer controlled by the Hittites.

[48] See Glatz (2013).

[49] See Beckman (2014); Beal (2014).

[50] See Singer (1991: 165–168).

Furthermore, Hittite kings tried to ensure the loyalty of several of the subordinated rulers by means of family ties; thus, the sovereigns of three kingdoms, Karkemiš, Aleppo, and Tarḫuntašša, descended from the royal house of Ḫatti. Furthermore, the subordinated rulers often married Hittite royal princesses and, hence, the rulers of several countries, such as Mittani, Ugarit, Amurru, Mira, the Šeḫa River Land, Ḫayaša, and Išuwa, became relatives of the Hittite Great Kings.

Notwithstanding, the prestige and credibility of the Hittite royal house were severely affected by a series of events that happened in the thirteenth century B.C.E. The inability to defend Mittani and the final Assyrian conquest demonstrated that Ḫatti was no longer capable of protecting all its subordinated polities. The disastrous result of the battle of Niḫriya[51] also undermined the prestige of the Hittite royal house. The Assyrian king tried to profit from his success by bringing further discredit upon the king of Ḫatti. Hence, the Assyrian court sent a long and detailed letter (RS 34.165)[52] that related the events at Niḫriya and demonstrated how weak the Great King of Ḫatti had become on the international scene. The aforementioned letter is fragmentary and the name of the receiver is not fully preserved, but it is usually assumed that he was the king of Ugarit.[53]

Tutḫaliya III's reaction was ambiguous, and he offered an iron fist to Assyria, as well as a velvet glove; in fact he imposed on Šaušgamuwa a ban on trade with Amurru and Assyria,[54] but at the same time several Assyrian documents show that Ḫatti and Assyria also had good economic and political relations in the last decades of the Hittite kingdom.[55]

Besides, the internal conflict between Muršili III and his uncle Ḫattušili shattered the stability of the institutional and personal relations that the former kings of Ḫatti had established with their subordinated rulers; in fact, the latter personages were obliged to take sides with either the legitimate sovereign or his opponent, who was the powerful brother of Muwatalli II. We may recall here that although Tutḫaliya III ascended to the throne as the heir of the usurper Ḫattušili II, he warned Šaušgamuwa, king of Amurru, against behaving as Mašduri, the ruler of the Šeḫa River Land, did; in fact, Mašduri took sides with Ḫattušili,[56] breaking the oath of loyalty that he had sworn to his overlord Muršili III.

[51] See Singer (1985); Bányai (2011); Yamada (2011); Bemporad (2002), who argued that the Hittite army was led by Prince Šuppiluliuma.

[52] See Dietrich (2003); Devecchi (2019).

[53] Instead, d'Alfonso (2006: 304ff.) assumed that the receiver of this letter was the pharaoh.

[54] See Beckman et al. (2011: 68).

[55] See Mora and Giorgieri (2004); Cancik-Kirschbaum (2008); Singer (2008); Giorgieri (2011).

[56] See the treaty concluded between Tutḫaliya III and Šaušgamuwa; see also Kitchen and Lawrence (2012: 595–608); Devecchi (2015: 225–232).

Lastly, the failed conspiracy planned by Prince Ḫešni against his brother Tutḫaliya III involved several members of the "aristocracy" and inflicted another severe wound on the image and authority of the Hittite royal house.[57]

Since the Hittite kingdom, which controlled polities and peoples of different cultures, languages, and traditions, had a strong need for charismatic leaders, the aforementioned events encouraged several local kings to claim greater independence and even a higher status than they had previously enjoyed.

The ruler of the small but wealthy kingdom of Ugarit seems to have become more and more reluctant to fulfil his vassal duties; since this topic has already been studied in depth by C. Glatz and E. Devecchi,[58] I will limit myself to just a few words. For example, as mentioned above, the Ugaritic king did not honour the Hittite king's request to ship cereals to Ḫatti. Furthermore, the decree issued by Tutḫaliya III (RS 17.59) established that the king of Ugarit had to deliver a huge amount of gold, instead of soldiers, to his Hittite overlord on the occasion of a military confrontation that presumably involved Assyria. Thus, Tutḫaliya III probably did not rely on the military cooperation of his subordinated ruler.[59]

The events related to Kuruntiya, king of Tarḫuntašša, a son of Muwatalli II and, hence, a cousin of Tutḫaliya III, have already been the subject of many studies; as is well known, Kuruntiya claimed to be a "Great King" in the Hatip rock relief.[60] This same title occurs in some seal impressions found at Ḫattuša. The aforementioned documents might support the assumption that Kuruntiya seized the throne of Ḫatti and acted as a Great King, until he was eventually removed by Tutḫaliya III.[61] But I. Singer[62] proposed a more plausible historical scenario and argued that in a period when the Hittite central power was weak, Tutḫaliya III, though formally refusing to recognize the supremacy claimed by Kuruntiya, maintained with him "a cautious *modus vivendi*". As Singer[63] wrote, in other periods of world history as well, two claimants for the imperial title were obliged to tolerate each other.

The treaty concluded by Tutḫaliya III with Kuruntiya, the so-called Bronze Tablet,[64] established that the latter king would receive a wider territory than the one previously assigned him by Ḫattušili II and granted him access to the mausoleum of his father, Muwatalli II, among several other privileges. Moreover, Kuruntiya was exempted from supplying soldiers to the Hittite army (iii 35–36). I share Matessi's assumption that this passage in the Bronze Tablet was not a favourable concession to Kuruntiya, but an attempt

[57] See van den Hout (1995: 206–211); Tani (2002).

[58] Glatz (2013); Devecchi (2019).

[59] See Klengel (1992: 140); Glatz (2013: 33).

[60] See Ehringhaus (2005: 101–107).

[61] See Goedegebuure (2012), with previous literature.

[62] Singer (1996).

[63] Singer (1996: 648).

[64] See Otten (1988).

to ensure that the king of Tarḫuntašša would not train and maintain his own standing army and would thus pose no threat to Tutḫaliya III.[65]

The decision to minimize or eliminate the military forces of those subordinated rulers whose loyalty to the Hittite crown was suspect, such as the kings of Ugarit and Tarḫuntašša, had disastrous consequences; in fact, when the Hittite central power collapsed, the local rulers of the coastal regions of Anatolia and Syria could not defend themselves against the attacks of the "Sea Peoples" or other enemies, and many of their cities suffered destruction.

Tutḫaliya III was concerned about the claims of autonomy professed by Kuruntiya and tried to reaffirm the authority of the central power by building monuments, dams, and water supplies, which had not only a practical function but also a ideological intent.[66] It is not by chance that the dam of Köylütolu, the altars of Emirgazi, and the Yalburt basin, which Tutḫaliya III sponsored, were all close to the borders of Tarḫuntašša.[67]

Another contested periphery was Western Anatolia, as is demonstrated by the fact that the rulers of Mira, the Šeḫa River Land, and Wiluša become more and more reluctant to accept Hittite overlordship.

The rock relief located at Karabel depicts the ruler of Mira Targašnawa with attributes that were otherwise exclusive to Hittite royal iconography.[68] Furthermore, the tablet KBo 18.18 preserves a letter sent by a Hittite king, who may have been Šuppiluliuma II, to the Great King Mašḫuitta. The latter personage may have been the last ruler of Mira[69] and, hence, if one shares this assumption, the last Hittite sovereigns would have accepted the "self-promotion" not only of the king of Tarḫuntašša, but also of the ruler of Mira.

The Tablet KUB 23.13 + documents a rebellion against the Hittites planned by Tarḫunaradu, who ruled the Šeḫa River Land. This event presumably happened during the reign of the Hittite king Tutḫaliya III, who eventually succeeded in capturing Tarḫunaradu.

The rebellion of Tarḫunaradu could be connected to what the letter KUB 19.55 + KUB 48.90 documents concerning the subordinated polity of Wilušiya[70]; in fact, this letter relates that the legitimate ruler of Wilušiya was removed from the throne by a group of rebels.

All the aforementioned texts record a situation of dramatic instability in western Anatolia at the end of the thirteenth century B.C.E. The Hittite kings restored the legitimate rulers in the polities of Seḫa and Wilušiya, but could not resolve the competition between

[65] See Matessi (2016: 648).

[66] See Bachmann (2017), concerning the Eflatun Pınar basin.

[67] As Matessi (2016: 13–14) argued.

[68] See de Martino (2010).

[69] See Hawkins (1998: 21–22).

[70] See Beckman et al. (2011: 123–133).

the central power and the peripheral polities, which either openly rebelled against Ḫatti or demanded more autonomous forms of government.

Moving towards the eastern border of Ḫatti, the tablet KBo 4.14[71] indicates that the subordinated ruler who was the addressee of this document did not support the Hittite king during the battle of Niḫriya. The deserter may be identified with a king of Išuwa,[72] who did not take the side of his Great King.[73]

Furthermore, the tribes of the Kaška, who inhabited northern Anatolia, never fully integrated into the kingdom of Ḫatti and repeatedly raided Hittite cities and villages.[74] The last kings of the Hittite dynasty were aware of their inability to control these extreme regions; hence, they created the subordinate buffer kingdom of Tummana, whose ruler had the honour of governing it, but also the difficult task of protecting the Hittite borders and assuring the maintenance of the cults and religious centres of northern Anatolia.[75]

Lastly, the landscape monuments, such as those located at İmamkulu and Hayneri that were sponsored by the high official Kuwalanamuwa,[76] are a clear sign of political competition between the central power and the local authorities.[77] As a matter of fact, Prince Kuwalanamuwa is depicted as a warrior standing before the gods on these two reliefs, and it is worth mentioning that this composition and iconography were usually reserved for royal representations of the Hittite kings.

C. Glatz and A. M. Plourde[78] argued that Kuwalanamuwa was a contemporary of Muršili II; instead, I assume that the Hittite officials were depicted on monuments and rock reliefs only from the second half of the thirteenth century B.C.E., when, as was already said, the centrifugal impulses of subordinated rulers and high dignitaries started to be tolerated by the kings of Ḫatti.[79]

One may also assume that these officials, who were local administrators on behalf of the Hittite king, could maintain the previous Hittite administrative structure in the Anatolian peripheral regions even after the collapse of Ḫatti, and started acting as "local chiefs".[80]

In conclusion, many of the subordinated rulers were no longer regularly fulfilling their duties; furthermore, they tried to inflate their status, at least inside the borders of their countries, and the Hittite kings apparently tolerated their claims. Some high officials also

[71] See Stefanini (1965).

[72] See Singer (1985).

[73] See Bemporad (2002) on the question whether this document and also the battle of Niḫriya date to the reign of either Tutḫaliya III or Šuppiluliuma II.

[74] See Glatz (2013).

[75] On the polity of Tummana see Cammarosano and Marizza (2015).

[76] See Ehringhaus (2005: 70–80).

[77] See Glatz and Plourde (2011).

[78] Glatz and Plourde (2011: 50).

[79] See de Martino (2010).

[80] See Mora and D'Alfonso (2012: 395); Matessi (2016).

acquired significant power and acted as local chiefs. The Hittite kingdom was losing its unity and cohesion and, hence, was no longer able to react to any sudden event that required a strong and quick reaction.

3 The End

We do not have any Hittite evidence concerning the events that transpired in the last years and days of the kingdom of Ḫatti. A sudden and dramatic event, such as the death of the king and the lack of an heir, might have caused an institutional crisis. Hence, I assume that either Šuppiluliuma II or his son died without leaving an heir who could ascend the throne. If the Hittite royal family indeed went extinct, the king of Karkemiš could legitimately claim the title of Great King, since he was the descendant of Šuppiluliuma I. This same title could also be claimed by Ḫartapu and other personages who were related in some way to the royal house of Ḫatti.[81]

We assume two different, but likely scenarios; it is possible that either Šuppiluliuma II or his heir abandoned Ḫattuša and established a new capital, though we do not know where the new residence was located, nor the reason for choosing a new royal residence.[82] If this was the case, the collection of cuneiform tablets and all the precious goods were transferred to this new place.

If not, when the last king of Ḫatti died, the king of Karkemiš, who took the imperial crown, may have been responsible for the transfer of the aforementioned tablets and goods. Hence, the tablets, which were considered to be of some interest to the new regime, could have been moved to Karkemiš and kept there.

With the death of the last Hittite king and the abandonment of the capital, the Hittite central system of governance collapsed, and the kingdom of Ḫatti broke up into smaller polities. The use of cuneiform writing and the Hittite language disappeared, instead, as is well known a Luwian cultural space survived in for centuries in the Neo-Hittite kingdoms.

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[81] See de Martino (2018) with previous literature.

[82] See de Martino (2018).

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The End of New Kingdom Egypt

Henning Franzmeier

The collapse of the New Kingdom marks one of the most profound changes in the five millennia of Egyptian history as it marked the end of an Egyptian empire ruled by native kings. A long history of research on how and why the Egyptian New Kingdom ended revolves around the question of whether this transition was caused by endogenous or exogenous factors, and the role of the processes at the end of the Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean. This article reviews the evidence from the Egyptian 19th and 20th Dynasties for the events leading towards the end. A complex scenario is proposed: many factors contributed and each would not have caused the end of the Egyptian political system of the New Kingdom alone. Decisive was the contemporaneity of a wide range of events and failures within the system, amongst which endogenous factors such as dynastic coincidence and internal economic problems met with the breakdown of the international trade system and attacks by foreign enemies such as the Sea Peoples and the Libyans who take over power in Egypt in the Third Intermediate Period.

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1 Introduction

The final transition from the New Kingdom into the so-called Third Intermediate Period in Egypt around 1077/76 BCE[1] is described as the end of an era of stability, which had lasted for more than 400 years.[2] While it might be needless to point out that the situation was neither static before nor after the end of the New Kingdom, the political system proved to be able to adapt to both internal and external change,[3] without any major interruption. The Ramesside Period (19th and 20th Dynasties), which precedes the end of the New Kingdom, has been described as a very innovative period in Pharaonic history.[4] Nonetheless, this innovativeness did not result in strategies which could insulate Egypt from the massive changes at the end of the Late Bronze Age. Even though some continuity can be observed,[5] the change from the 20th to the 21st Dynasty is profound and not just the end of a Dynasty or the transition towards a new system of government.[6] The Egyptian state had been an empire at least in New Kingdom with some markers of an Empire already present in the preceding phases of the Middle Kingdom in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC[7]; however, it never became the center of a stable empire again.[8]

Moreover, the end of the New Kingdom needs to be seen in the context of the Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was a period which saw a group of state actors such as the Hittite Empire, the Mycenaean state(s), as well as many city states, such as Ugarit, interacting with each other.[9] This included frequent conflicts but also problem-

[1] The absolute dates used are taken from Hornung et al. (2006: 493). These dates are currently under discussion and might differ in a couple of years; See Knapp and Manning (2016: 113) with further literature.

[2] For an overview of the history of the New Kingdom in general, see O'Connor (1983); Kemp (1991); Bryan (2002); van Dijk (2002); For a recent, short roundup, see Spalinger (2016).

[3] The most remarkable change probably being the interlude of the so-called Amarna Period in the second half of the fourteenth century BCE. See Dodson (2009, 2016b), including an exhaustive bibliography on various aspects.

[4] Kubisch and Rummel (2018: 1). This innovativeness includes diplomacy, architecture, as well as religion.

[5] See van de Mieroop (2010: 250). For an overview of some older currents of research regarding the end of the Late Bronze Age, when the continuities were stressed.

[6] See also Morris (2018) who ends her book on ancient Egyptian Imperialism with the end of the New Kingdom.

[7] For a discussion of the question of whether Egypt can be called an empire in the 2nd millennium BC, see Witthuhn (2014); Jansen-Winkeln (2014); Other authors detect an Egyptian imperialism as early as the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, see Morris (2018).

[8] During most following periods until today, Egypt was either part of empires ruled from outside Egypt or ruled by foreign royal houses. Only since 1952 AD has an independent Egypt been ruled again by Egyptians.

[9] For an overview of the period, see van de Mieroop (2010).

solving mechanisms such as a sophisticated diplomatic system[10] as well as a far-reaching trade network. This period which might be called "regional globalism[11]", ended in the twelfth century BCE in a development, recently termed a "collapse of civilization".[12] Most state actors such as the Hittite Empire (see contribution by S. de Martino in this volume) vanished and the established international trade network, connecting the region, broke down, leaving traces also in the material culture of Egypt.[13]

In the past, the discussion of the reasons for this change revolved mainly around the question of whether primarily endogenous or exogenous factors are responsible for the end of this epoch.[14] While various potential causes can be identified in the available evidence, their interpretation and weight pose the main obstacle. The major question is who was first: the chicken or the egg? As will be shown, this question is difficult to answer as is the question of the starting point. The present discussion begins with the reigns of Seti I and Ramesses II in the thirteenth century BC. It is these reigns which sees the advent of both factors, one of the decisive exogenous factors—the Libyans—and an important endogenous factor—internal instability—relating to the royal succession which might be one of the results of the long reign of Ramesses II. This does of course not mean that the process sketched out, was already predetermined from this time, inevitably leading to the end of the New Kingdom. Different human agency and probably also alternative natural conditions might have yielded an entirely different result.

2 Available Evidence

Examining a historical process which took place more than 3000 years ago, necessarily involves very fragmented evidence. We can neither consider the evidence present as complete nor representative. Important events might be unknown to us[15] while the ones

[10] See for instance Roth (2006) for the diplomatic system into which Egypt was included.

[11] For the application of the term "globalism" to the Late Bronze Age, see Bernbeck (2015).

[12] The title of Eric Cline's influential book, describing this period, is "1177 B.C.—The Year Civilization Collapsed". Cline (2014).

[13] On the archaeological evidence, integrating uninscribed material culture, see Sect. 2.2.

[14] Assmann (1999: 311) sees endogenous processes at work: "Dieses Ende ist vollkommen eindeutig die Konsequenz innerer Auflösungsprozesse…"; In contrast Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 147) highlights the exogenous factors as decisive: "Die Krisensymptome, die wir im Ägypten der späteren Ramessidenzeit beobachten können, sind nicht zuletzt, vermutlich sogar in erster Linie, durch Angriffe und Übergriffe äußerer Feinde bedingt; die inneren Schwierigkeiten sind vor allem die Folge äußerer Störungen, also sekundär." Even though these quotes are short and get relativized especially in the case of Assmann, they represent the general discussion.

[15] Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 127) states: "In der ägyptischen Geschichte können Dreißigjährige Kriege und mehr in den Lücken unserer Belege verschwinden,…".

we know about might not be as central as they seem.[16] It is of prime importance to keep in mind that absence of evidence does not mean evidence of absence.[17]

2.1 Written and Iconographic Sources

Regarding written sources, a huge loss needs to be expected. According to a recent estimate, only 1 out of 100,000 papyri might have survived.[18] Even though non-organic materials used for writing such as sherds or monuments made of stone (i.e. stelae, tombs, and temple walls) were more likely to survive, the rate will still be very low.

Another bias is of a geographical nature: the large majority of texts comes from the Theban area in Upper Egypt. Almost no texts are known from other parts of the country, especially Lower Egypt and the Nile Delta. While this is being interpreted as Lower Egypt having been in trouble or already at an earlier time under the influence of Libyans,[19] one must stress the fact that the bad (or better non-) preservation of all organic documents (e.g. papyri), as well as ostraca,[20] and monuments made of limestone,[21] especially in the Nile Delta might have also played a major role.

A further problem of written sources is the bias towards the literate part of society, which can be assumed to have been as low as 1% in the period described here.[22] Apart from a corpus of texts from Deir el-Medina,[23] the non-elite only appears in written documents when being in touch with members of the elite, such as the tomb-robbery papyri.[24]

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[16] This has been suggested for the battles against the Sea Peoples, the texts and depictions of which are taken as one of the central pieces of evidence for the end of the Late Bronze Age not only in Egypt but in the whole Eastern Mediterranean; See Knapp and Manning (2016: 118) with references to further reading.

[17] On the topic within the field of Egyptology, see Gee (2010).

[18] Burkard and Thissen (2003: 1).

[19] See Jansen-Winkeln (2015: 37).

[20] The wet conditions of the Delta renders ink on pottery sherds almost invisible. During the work in Qantir-Pi-Ramesse since 1980 only 15 ostraca were identified out of an amount of about 1 million ceramic sherds. None of them was preserved well enough to allow a comprehensive reading. The dockets found by Hamza in 1928 (Hamza 1930: 43) came most probably from higher and thus dryer, levels, destroyed today.

[21] Monuments made of granite or granite were reused, especially in the buildings of the Third Intermediate Period in Tanis and Bubastis. Uphill (1984); Gilli (2016); limestone in contrast was often burnt at later times for producing lime for a lime burning kiln. Pusch and Becker (2017: 97). As most large-scale representations and long texts can be expected to be made from limestone, the lack of monuments comes as no surprise.

[22] Baines and Eyre (1983: 65–72). Their highest estimate is a literacy rate of approximately 1%.

[23] For a recent overview including an extensive bibliography see Toivari-Viitala (2011).

[24] Papyrus Abbott, Papyrus Leopold II-Amherst, and Papyrus Mayer B. For a translation, see Peden (1994: 225–264).

Iconographic sources are even more rare; they are mostly confined to temple walls and royal and elite tombs. Most important, and most influential, for our view on the end of the New Kingdom are the depictions of the battles against Libyans and Sea Peoples at Medinet Habu, the mortuary temple of Ramesses III.[25]

Relevant texts and representations from outside Egypt are rare while in many cases evidence from Egypt is being used for reconstructing the situation in other countries. Once more the temple of Medinet Habu is a prime example. The existing texts, such as the Egyptian-Hittite correspondence, found at the Hittite Capital Hattuša[26] or the documents from Ugarit,[27] do not give us much relevant information regarding Egypt. They are more informative for the conditions in the Hittite Empire and Ugarit, and they end in the early twelfth century BCE, one century before the end of the New Kingdom.[28]

Ancient Egyptian Historiography (?) or How Useful Are the Texts?

The amount of historical information that can be gathered from ancient Egyptian texts is debated. While the texts relating to Ramesses III's battles against the Sea Peoples have long been taken at face value, they were later seen much more critical by some and the importance of what is told in the texts came into question.[29]

Indeed, ancient Egyptian texts cannot be regarded as historiography in the modern sense as an "objective and methodological analyses of historical events".[30] A genre of historiography, comparable to Greek and Roman examples does not exist.[31] Nonetheless, Egyptian texts contain historical information. Data is being presented with a specific purpose of displaying the protagonist coping with events, presenting him in a positive light. Historical criticism[32] is missing, as might be events which were not advantageous for the Egyptian king such as lost battles. The victorious side presents itself as being ideologically correct. The exercise of power decided whether a conflict party could legitimize itself,

[25] For the depictions see The Epigraphic Survey (1932).

[26] See Cordani (2017) with references to the extensive older literature.

[27] For an introduction, with an extensive bibliography see Mynárová (2010).

[28] Their presumed Egyptian counterpart, the archives in Pi-Ramesse, has not yet been found. Only one fragment of a cuneiform tablet was found out of context in 2003. For the latest translation with a bibliography, see Cordani (2017:152–154).

[29] See Knapp and Manning (2016: 118). This of course also relates to the question of missing evidence as described above, potentially leading to the overestimation of events known from the surviving texts.

[30] Popko (2014: 1).

[31] Popko (2014: 4).

[32] Popko (2014: 10).

automatically putting the opposition into the illegality of the evildoer.[33] Thus, texts cannot be dismissed as pure propaganda with the events described being inventions.[34]

Another problem is related to rulers, later deemed illegitimate. Inscriptions were erased or changed, the rulers are not being included in official king-lists.[35]

Administrative documents or letters can provide additional information. Of special interest are a couple of papyri which give an insight into investigations into tomb robberies, the judicial sentences against the protagonists of a conspiracy against Ramesses III, and thefts in Theban temples.[36] A problem is that they rarely tell a whole story as only single documents are preserved out of a whole dossier which might have existed.[37] Moreover, they could be very much biased, "written by people with an agenda to divert responsibility, to not tell the whole story, to obfuscate"[38] and a "public relations exercise", demonstrating a state control of affairs which might not have existed at the time.[39] Thus, we cannot take for granted that the procedures reported were as efficient as it seems. Once more, the texts should not be dismissed but interpreted in an appropriate way.

2.2 Archaeological Evidence

Uninscribed material culture as a source to reconstruct Ancient Egyptian history has often been regarded as secondary to texts.[40] This comes as no surprise given the difficulties of drawing the relationship between an archaeological feature and an event, often due to the lack of chronological resolution. Even if very exact dates for archaeological features are available, the connection to a certain event is difficult to draw as the historical absolute chronology is subject to ongoing debates.[41] But also "privileging written sources leaves us

[33] Von der Way (1992: 31) (footnote 199).

[34] This approach is being chosen by many relevant authors in the few last years. Redford (2018: 111), writes on the reliefs of Medinet Habu: "It is foolish to maintain that figures arise out of nothing, but one should be careful in assuming an exact correspondence to reality".

[35] Works of the potential usurper Amenmesse of the later 19th Dynasty were subject to such procedures, whose names were often replaced by those of Seti II. This causes uncertainty for pieces of evidence such as statues. See Dodson (2016a: 47–67).

[36] Translations, comments, and bibliographies are to be found in Peden (1994: 195–280).

[37] The most obvious example is probably the Turin Judicial Papyrus, Peden (1994: 195–210), giving an account of a plot against Ramesses III, ending in death sentences for many involved. The essential information whether the king was killed during the conspiracy or not, is missing. It can be assumed that everybody involved knew what had happened and it is not the purpose of the text to narrate the events.

[38] Cooney (2018: 64).

[39] Cooney (2018:64); Eyre (2011: 709).

[40] Smith (2010: 159).

[41] See Knapp and Manning (2016: 117).

with an incomplete and one sided view of the ancient Egyptians".[42] The use of the archaeological record thus lies its capacity to "establish patterns of cultural interaction and trade"[43] as well as in tracing developments of a longer duration and in adding information in areas or periods where no texts are preserved.[44] Examples are excavations at settlements such as the Ramesside capital Qantir-Piramesse in the Nile Delta[45] or the use life of coffins as historic documents.[46] A set of evidence, specific to Egypt are the royal mummies which are preserved for many pharaohs of the period in question. These can provide answers to questions such as the cause of death.[47]

3 Changes

To assess the reasons for the transition from the New Kingdom to the Third Intermediate Period, it is necessary to describe the major changes that took place. These can be divided into several groups, amongst them political and cultural changes.

1. *Territorial Contraction (see map)*: Over a period of about 50 years, Egypt loses all foreign territories in the Levant and Nubia.[48]

[42] Smith (2010: 186).

[43] Smith (2010: 163).

[44] See above, Sect. 2.1.

[45] For the latest overview see Franzmeier and Pusch (2016). A current project targets the development of pottery in the 20th/21st dynasty to shed more light on changes in trading networks.

[46] Cooney (2018). See also below section "Interruption of International Networks".

[47] For the death of Ramesses III, see Hawass et al. (2012).

[48] The Egyptian rule over the Levant ends with Ramesses VI. Finkelstein et al. (2017a: 261); Nubia is lost at the very end of the 20th Dynasty, with some of the colonial settlements continuing beyond the end of the New Kingdom thanks to an entanglement with the local population, creating communities that "although they may have retained some ties to Egypt, Nubia was their home". Smith and Buzon (2018: 223); The contraction also includes activities in the Sinai and the desert regions adjacent to the Nile Valley where (semi-) precious stones and hard stones are being quarried; no evidence points to activities in the Sinai after the reign of Ramesses VI. Hikade (1996: 18–20); the Eastern Desert in Upper Egypt sees activities until the reign of Ramesses IX. Hikade (1996: 59).

2. *Territorial fission*[49] *and the end of a centralized state*: In the later 19th Dynasty, Egypt for the first time was effectively split in two parts for about 4 years.[50] This happened again at the end of the 20th Dynasty[51] and became permanent in the Third Intermediate Period with up to twenty contemporary rulers, ruling often rather small territories.[52] This fragmentation lasts about 400 years until the "reunification" under a central ruler in the 26th Dynasty in the mid-seventh century BCE.
3. *Foreign rule*: The 21st Dynasty can be interpreted as a foreign (i.e. Libyan) rule in Egypt, with both the high-priests of Amun and the kings in Tanis being of Libyan origin.[53] The Libyan part of society was mainly active within the military, the Egyptians in this period were confined to agriculture and production. Moreover, priests were recruited out of the Egyptian part of the population.[54] This change became permanent. Still Psamtek I, who reunited Egypt in the 26th Dynasty seems to have had a Libyan background.[55]
4. *The idea of kingship and the role of the king*: In texts of the Third Intermediate Period it becomes common that the god Amun plays the role of the king.[56] The kings themselves, even though they still have royal attributes, make it clear that their role has changed and that they have stepped back behind the god. One of the clearest symptoms of this transition is the much more prominent role of oracles where the god "decides" on issues. The change also included a somewhat opposing trend which has been called the end of the internal separation of powers,[57] with the king becoming a kind of dictator, combining priestly and military titles.
5. *Cultural changes*: Aspects visible to us are funerary practices and changes in the repertoire of personal names that seem to have affected larger parts of the population.[58] The change in funerary customs might be interpreted as a symptom of the economic problems as they include the reuse of coffins and the discontinuation of the construction

[49] I owe this term to Jürgen Paul who used it during the conference to describe the processes at the end of the Mongol Empire.

[50] Seti II was challenged by the usurper Amenmesse who ruled the South. The northernmost evidence for Amenmesse is a faience vessel from Riqqa. See Dodson (2016a: 37); No evidence has appeared so far in Pi-Ramesse where Seti II is known from a lintel. See Pusch (1999).

[51] A viceroy of Kush, named Panehesy, takes over power in the South and is driven into Nubia. Van Dijk (2002: 302).

[52] Jansen-Winkeln (2015: 36).

[53] See the ground-breaking article by Jansen-Winkeln (1994).

[54] Jansen-Winkeln (2015: 46) Old administrative structures are abolished as is evidenced by the absence of titles of office during the New Kingdom. Jansen-Winkeln (1999: 16).

[55] Jansen-Winkeln (2012: 622).

[56] See Jansen-Winkeln (1995: 77–78) for this process, including a further bibliography.

[57] Assmann (1999: 323).

[58] Jansen-Winkeln (2016). The Libyan element of these changes is a subject of ongoing debate and often difficult to assess as not much is known about Libyan culture.

of monumental tombs.[59] Furthermore, some religious changes (see below) such as the proscription of the god Seth are presumed to have taken place, even though this is debated at the moment.[60] Another process at the end of Ramesside Egypt is what has been called a crisis of values[61]: a new religious phenomenon which replaces the concept of adhering to the established order to secure a good life in both the world of the living and the dead.[62] The new principle, also called personal piety ("Persönliche Frömmigkeit"),[63] is based on the personal connection to a god who effectively replaces the human patrons, ultimately the king. An expression is the burial places of the elite which are no longer connected to the king. Holders of high offices do not get buried close to the king but close to the gods. Most often these gods are gods of the places where the persons' families come from.[64] Thus, the local temple becomes a point of reference while the king was set aside.

6. *Tomb robberies*: The royal necropolis in the Valley of the Kings near Thebes was abandoned. Further, the systematic clearance of the tombs in the 21st Dynasty is interpreted as a state-run activity.[65] Besides, also private theft became widespread.[66]
7. *Economic downturn and material culture*: A general economic downturn is visible in some of the texts from Deir el-Medina that report on the shortage of grain and delays in the delivery of supplies.[67] Grain seems to have become much more expensive in the period.[68] Furthermore, the construction activities of the later 20th Dynasty can be described as comparably meagre.

[59] On the general development of the burial customs during the Third Intermediate Period, see Aston (2009: 397–400).

[60] Hope and Warfe (2017).

[61] Vernus (1993: 157–170) speaks of a "crise des valeurs"; while Eyre (2011) more specifically discusses corruption.

[62] Vernus (1993: 192–193).

[63] The term was coined in 1911 by Adolf Erman. Luiselli (2011: 1); It is explained in detail by Assmann (1999: 259–277); For a recent overview, see Luiselli (2011); She also includes references to skeptical authors. Luiselli (2011: 6).

[64] Franzmeier and Moje (2018).

[65] The plundering might have started with private ventures. See the magisterial work by Jansen-Winkeln (1995); For a different view, see Graefe (1999: 27–34); In addition to precious materials, wooden objects; including coffins and sarcophagi, were reused. Jansen-Winkeln (1995: 72). Psusennes I was buried at Tanis in a sarcophagus made for Merenptah, while Horsiese I., a local ruler in 22nd Dynasty Thebes, was buried in the lower part of the sarcophagus of Ramesses II's queen Henutmire Ramesses. Dodson (2012: 67); Moje (2014: 407).

[66] Strudwick (2013).

[67] Vernus (1993: 73–97); For the latest account, see Gabler (2018: 537–547) with further literature.

[68] O'Connor (1983: 228 with Fig. 3.10).

Changes in the material culture can be interpreted as a result of cultural changes but do certainly also relate to the economic situation. Especially affected are imported goods such as coniferous wood.[69] Invisible in contrast is the Libyan component in the surviving material culture. For instance, no Libyan pottery can be identified in the archaeological record.[70]

4 The Reasons of Change

A variety of reasons have been brought forward in the past to explain the changes sketched out above. These potential factors will be examined, ordered into three major categories: natural causes, exogenous, and endogenous factors.

4.1 Natural Factors

Natural causes for the end of the New Kingdom can be found inside and outside Egypt. Inside Egypt, the fluctuations of the level of the Nile are of interest as they have in the past been connected to the decline.[71] Unfortunately, the data for the height of Nile floods in the 19th and 20th Dynasties is very limited and not helpful for the discussion of the reasons for the end of the New Kingdom.[72] Only the analysis of climatic data from the Nile catchment in East Africa can give hints at the moment, pointing to unusual fluctuations of rainfall in the area during the period in question.[73] But without Nile flood data from Egypt, the actual effect is hard to ascertain.[74]

Outside Egypt the question of drought and earthquakes have been related to the end of the Late Bronze Age. Such occurrences might have had an indirect effect on Egypt as

[69] See section “Interruption of International Networks”.

[70] There is a small amount of locally made pottery at the Ramesside fortress of Zawiyet Umm el-Rakham which is not entirely Egyptian (Nielsen 2016). But this does not allow an assessment of any Libyan influence on the development of pottery in Egypt in the period. It might be supposed that pottery was not useful for a non-sedentary desert-lifestyle as is assumed for the Libyan population in their homeland.

[71] Said (1993: 150–152); Antoine (2009), interprets fluctuations in the delivery of grain, wood and especially fish to Deir el-Medina as results of very high and low Nile floods in the twelfth century BC; His ideas were recently rejected by Gabler and others (Gabler 2018: 538).

[72] Butzer’s (1984: 109–110) arguments are very problematic as they are not based on scientific data but are merely an interpretation of textual sources such as the evidence for an inflation regarding the prices of cereals, where we do not securely know whether this is a result of bad harvests due to low Nile floods or endogenous problems in the administration. Thus, a circular argument is the result.

[73] Antoine (2009: 7), with further literature.

[74] The interpretation of Antoine (2009: 7) of data from Deir el-Medine as showing the effects of unusually high and low Nile floods has been criticized; See Gabler (2018: 539) with further literature.

underlying reasons for a mounting pressure from migration and part of the explanation for the breakdown of the trading system. In the case of the Levant in the 20th Dynasty, the effect might have even been more direct, affecting the sustenance of the Egyptian garrisons.[75] But overall, the direct influence on Egypt was limited and the causalities remain largely unclear, especially due to the low chronological resolution of any investigation of the topic.[76]

4.2 Exogenous Reasons

The Libyans: Battles, Egyptianization and Conquest

The term "Libyan" refers to groups of people living to the west of Egypt.[77] By the time of the New Kingdom they were already long-known to the Egyptians and interactions had spanned millennia.[78] While during the 18th Dynasty no wars or any other substantial events are known, the 19th Dynasty sees a profound change[79] with new groups such as the Meshwesh and the Libu appearing.[80] Known battles take place under Seti I and Merenptah during the 19th Dynasty and under Ramesses III during the 20th Dynasty. After the wars against the Libyans, those people were forcibly settled[81] and used as mercenaries, Egyptianized through this action and quickly increasing the ranks to finally becoming a military elite from which also descended the kings of the Third Intermediate Period. During the later 20th Dynasty, Libyan raids in Egypt were frequent and could explain some of the economic problems in the Theban area.[82]

The great importance of the Libyan question lies in the fact that Libyans became Egypt's new rulers in the Third Intermediate Period. This takeover of power has two components: a slow process relating to the settlement of foreigners—members of the Sea Peoples but

[75] Finkelstein et al. (2017b: 256).

[76] Knapp and Manning (2016: 112–113).

[77] The Libyans are basically known only from the Egyptian sources. Thus, the Libyan identity as visible to us, is constructed by the Egyptians and does not necessarily reflect the Libyans own view and might also combine much more than one ethnic group. Furthermore, the Libyans of the 3rd millennium might be totally different from the ones of the late 2nd millennium.

[78] The earliest mentions of Tjehenu-Libyans are dated to the beginning of Egyptian history. See for instance Brovarski (2016).

[79] Except for one doubtful event during the reign of Amenhotep I. Kitchen (1990: 15).

[80] We do not know whether this indicates a migration of peoples as no other sources describe the inhabitants of the period in that region and no remains of material culture can be attributed to such groups. Kitchen (1990:16).

[81] See the rhetorical stela of Ramesses III at Deir el-Medina where it is stated that "he [the king] makes disappear their [the Libyans] language". Kitchen (1990: 21); For the designation of the process as forced migration into Egypt, see Langer (2017:43).

[82] Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 139).

especially Libyans—in the Egyptian heartland after the wars[83] and rapid final military victories.[84] As this process, to which the term "barbarization" has been applied[85] and its interpretation are of central importance to assess whether exogenous factors (i.e. strength of the Libyans) or endogenous factors (i.e. internal weakness, allowing the Libyans to take over power) are responsible for the end of the New Kingdom, it deserves a longer discussion.

This question is fueled by the recent discussion on the importance of the process of barbarization for the end of the Late Roman Empire in its western territories. As the Eastern Roman Empire also employed foreigners without collapsing in the same period, this has been questioned recently.[86] Disloyalty, as proposed by Jansen-Winkeln,[87] is also not necessarily a result of barbarization, as has been pointed out.[88]

In Egypt, the process might be more a symptom than the ultimate cause. While the Libyans surely posed a substantial threat to the Egyptian state, the take-over of the country was at least facilitated by internal processes such as problems in succession and cultural developments, favoring the Libyan system of rule.[89] Another advantage might have been the system of kinship amongst the Libyans, the stability of which gave them an advantage in an unstable period.[90] Furthermore, the Libyan takeover of the country was facilitated by the fact that they were made to serve in the military in a period in which the military was considerably more important than before. The prominence of the army was already rooted in late 18th and early 19th Dynasties when the kings had a military background. The continuous threat and internal conflicts fought with military forces, enhanced the importance of the military even more. Thus, the Libyans in Egypt held a key position, which

[83] Kitchen (1990: 21); Snape (2012: 418–419).

[84] Jansen-Winkeln (2015: 38).

[85] Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 130–131) (Jansen-Winkeln (2015) does not employ the term anymore). Barbarization as a term is used for the description of processes in the Late Roman Empire of the fourth to the sixth centuries AD. Börm (2013: 160–162); where foreigners, serving in the Roman military, in the end took over parts of the former Western part of the Empire as kings. Not only Libyans were employed in the Egyptian army but also Sea-Peoples (mainly Sherden) and Nubians. These groups will not be discussed in detail here as they were not that relevant for the development of Egypt. For the Sherden see, Cavillier (2005: 55–65); And for the Nubians Gnirs (1996: 197–198).

[86] Börm (2013: 165). It is not clear whether the situation during earlier phases of the Roman Empire was so different given that already much earlier many foreign soldiers were employed (Börm 2013: 162).

[87] Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 145).

[88] Börm (2013: 165).

[89] See sections "The Protagonists: Dynastic Coincidence and Problems in Succession" and "Economic Problems and Cultural Change".

[90] Snape (2012: 437).

enabled the takeover of the country. In the end a final attack by Libyans from the outside or the inside brought the process to a sudden end, leading to Libyan rule.[91]

Sea Peoples

In most discussions on the end of the Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean the so-called Sea Peoples play an important role.[92] The appearance of the Sea Peoples is not a singular event but is linked to a process which took some time with some groups appearing earlier than others.[93] In Egypt, they are mentioned prominently on two occasions as opponents: as confederates of the Libyans under Merenptah and during the reign of Ramesses III when the famous battle against the Sea Peoples took place. As with the Libyans in Egypt, the idea of the Sea Peoples using a power vacuum was brought forward recently.[94]

In Egypt, there is no evidence for major battles won by the Sea Peoples. While this is no surprise as official records of a lost battle are not expected to exist, the story of the Sea Peoples after the battles is similar to that of the Libyans. They were settled in strongholds alongside the Libyans and were also able to enter the ranks of the Egyptian army.[95] However, the Sea Peoples had a more significant impact on the Egyptian Empire in the Levant. The settlement of Sea Peoples in the Levant has been identified as the cause of the end of the Egyptian rule in this area and the beginning of Philistine influence, as the Philistines were part of the Sea Peoples.[96]

Hence, the importance of the Sea Peoples for the end of the Egyptian Empire should not be overestimated, although they surely played a role in the destabilization of the whole Eastern Mediterranean, affecting Egypt and its trade networks. Of interest is the fact that the power vacuum caused in the north was not filled by the Egyptian Empire. Therefore, it can be concluded that either the Sea Peoples were too strong or Egypt was already too weak to use the situation in its own interests.[97]

[91] Jansen-Winkeln (2015: 38).

[92] Cline (2014). Eric Clines book takes its title from the year of the battle between the troops of Ramesses III and the Sea Peoples.

[93] The Sherden already appear in texts from the Amarna Period in the fourteenth century BC. See Cavillier (2005: 5).

[94] Cline (2014: 157).

[95] Cavillier (2005: 30–33).

[96] Cline (2014: 158), referring to works by Finkelstein who thinks that in the Levant the arrival of Sea Peoples was a longer process, lasting until the reign of Ramesses VI, when the Egyptian rule over the Levant ended.

[97] The campaign of Ramesses III in the northern Levant in his 11th/12th year might have been an initial attempt to fill the vacuum. It had no long-lasting effect with Libyan attacks on Upper Egypt and the Philistines moving into the southern Levant in the later reign of Ramesses III. See Kahn (2018: 184).

Interruption of International Networks

One of the most important effects of the end of the Late Bronze Age was the interruption of international networks, both diplomatic and economic. On the economic side, the supply of luxury goods as well as important raw material was severely affected.

The new difficulties in obtaining foreign products are very well illustrated by the story of Wenamun, when during the transitional phase at the very end of the New Kingdom an official was sent to the Levant to obtain cedar wood for a barque (religious boat) of the god Amun.[98] While the story itself is most likely fictional, it can nevertheless be taken as a good sign of the changed situation. Instead of simply ordering subordinate rulers of the Levant to provide the wood, the Egyptian envoy is treated as a petitioner.

While the effect of the lack of supplies of an important material such as copper ingots or cedar wood for ships is immediately evident, also luxury goods that likely played a role in elite society became rarer. One of the examples is the already mentioned lack of good quality wood for funeral equipment. This led not just to an economically induced reuse of coffins but it affected the patronal system of New Kingdom Egypt. When the patron (i.e. ultimately the king) is not able anymore to guarantee his subjects the supply with goods necessary for the display of status, the status of the patron becomes weakened.[99]

Another effect was the destruction of the diplomatic networks. Late Bronze Age diplomacy was not always able to prevent wars but the opponents were known and treaties were agreed upon. A relatively stable balance of powers was reached with wars mainly affecting the peripheries of the major players such as Hittites and Egyptians. In the 20th Dynasty the international situation became much more volatile and decentralized,[100] the enemies were not always clear, and in the case of the Sea Peoples, the probably heterogeneous group structure prevented negotiations which might have helped solve the conflicts.

4.3 Endogenous Reasons

The second set of potential reasons for the decline of Ramesside Egypt is to be found within the country. The factors will be presented top-down, starting with the protagonists i.e. the pharaohs and ending with more structural problems, potentially affecting larger parts of the population.

[98] For the story of Wenamun and its interpretation see, Schipper (2005); Jansen-Winkeln (2015: 38). With references to more recent literature.

[99] Cooney (2018: 66). “The 20th Dynasty demanded an overthrow of old patrons once their payrolls dried up”.

[100] Cline (2014: 152–154). Cline refers mainly to economic decentralization. But this of course also holds true for politics.

The Protagonists: Dynastic Coincidence and Problems in Succession

An assessment of the effect of the kings' personalities on the history of the New Kingdom is almost impossible.[101] The reigns can only be reconstructed via known events and some indirect hints from atypical monuments. Furthermore, the royal mummies serve as a source providing us with some biological data. With all evidence available, the phenomenon of dynastic coincidence ("Dynastischer Zufall"[102]) in combination with unclear rules of succession are traceable and were certainly important. Ramses II's longevity—he reigned for 67 years, dying at a very old age—is one example. While one can only speculate about him being senile or not,[103] the long reign resulted in his fourth crown prince Merenptah (who was the 13th son in total) finally becoming king at an already advanced age.[104] Moreover, Ramesses II fathered at least 101 sons and daughters.[105] Already the sheer size of the royal family made problems more likely. Further complication arose from a system of succession being related to the rank of the mother amongst the royal wives.[106] An effect might have been the disputed succession from Merenptah to his rightful heir Seti II, when a second person claimed kingship. Amenmesse, who is most likely to be identified with the earlier viceroy of Kush called Messuy, was probably another grandson of Ramesses II.[107] As stated, Seti II ruled eventually. The remaining years of the 19th Dynasty were also very unstable,[108] with Sethnakht emerging as the founder of the 20th Dynasty. As even

[101] The question was especially raised in the discussion after the presentation on the end of Czarist Russia by Matthias Stadelmann. For Ancient Egypt, no sources are preserved which were written by third persons, describing the king or his actions; no documents transmit clear hints at certain kings' personalities.

[102] Used by Alfred Kohler in the lecture on Karl V. during the conference. It refers to coincidental events affecting dynastic succession (i.e., early death of the king or long reign).

[103] Kitchen (1982: 206).

[104] He must have been at least in his 40s upon accession. Brand (2016: 20) thinks he might have even been in his 60s upon accession.

[105] Brand (2016: 22). 48 sons and 53 daughters can be identified from the sources. It is unknown though, how unusual the seemingly high number of offspring is. This is related to the fact that only Ramesses II, and to some extent Ramesses III and Herihor, displayed their offspring prominently; Other long-reigning kings of the 18th Dynasty might have had also high numbers of offspring, even though less princes are known from the whole 18th Dynasty than of Ramesses II. Brand (2016: 7 and 30).

[106] Brand (2016: 20); The rank of the wives of Ramesses II might have been related to the outcome of the "baby race", i.e. which queen was the first to give birth to a son. Brand (2016: 14); Snape (2012: 412) calls it the generation of a "complex succession crisis".

[107] Dodson (2016a: 42–43).

[108] The chronologically more stable factors in this period were some high officials such as high priests of Amun or viziers, whose terms of office sometimes spanned several reigns. Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 134).

Sethnakht, might have been a descendant of Ramesses II, who had just died about 21 years before his accession,[109] this could be considered a family feud.[110]

Another internal factor, are diseases affecting the ruler. The mummy of king Siptah who followed Seti II, shows a crippled foot, maybe a result of cerebral palsy or poliomyelitis.[111] Furthermore, he was obviously very young at the age of death after about 6 years of reign. Whatever might have been his background, these biological data fit in well with a reign where the queen Tausret and a high official, sometimes referred to as "grey eminence" named Beya were the real rulers. Whether in this period some kings might have been subject to an unnatural death as Jansen-Winkeln speculates, would make further research on the mummies necessary.[112]

Large royal families in combination with an unclear system of succession became once more a factor of instability in the 20th Dynasty during the reign of Ramesses III. The end of the reign ended in the so-called harem conspiracy in which the king was probably killed.[113] Even though we do not know about the motives of the plotters it could well be that the problem was related to internal conflicts in the family.[114] It cannot be completely excluded though that the plot was a reaction to the problems the country was facing.[115]

The later 20th Dynasty seems to have been once more characterized by problems in succession and short reigns, even though many details are lacking. After Ramesses IV, who seems to have been the rightful heir of his father Ramesses III, two further sons of Ramesses III reigned Egypt as Ramesses VI and Ramesses VIII. The interludes of

[109] The kinship cannot be proven but Dodson (2016a: 119 with FN 1) suspects the relation based on the name containing the name of the god Seth.

[110] Jansen-Winkeln interprets in contrast these internal problems as a potential result of successful campaigns of Libyans and/or Sea Peoples. Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 132); The idea of Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 132) is that Amenmesse might have fought an enemy in Thebes, taking over kingship at the end of a victorious campaign (though this is problematic in my opinion). It would suggest that the attack should have come from the deserts as the king seems to have stayed in the north. It is hardly convincing to think that both were at the same time in the south of the country if the enemy would have come from the north.

[111] Dodson (2016a: 103). If the identification as cerebral palsy is correct, even cognitive capabilities of the king might have been affected.

[112] Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 132).

[113] Hawass et al. (2012).

[114] Snape (2012: 412). He compares the situation to Ramesses II. Furthermore, Heather Lee McCarthy interprets the almost total absence of royal wives from the monumental record as sign that Ramesses III might have suppressed the power and influence of his queens in comparison to Ramesses II, adding to the problematic situation (personal communication 11.11.2018; presented at the SSEA 2016 scholars' colloquium under the title The Royal Women of Ramesses III: Representation and Rules of Decorum); Gregory (2014: 152) thinks of the antagonism between Thebes and the North as important factor which is difficult to prove.

[115] For the internal problems in the later reign of Ramesses III and their possible relationship to a military encounter in regnal year 28, see Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 138–139).

Ramesses V and Ramesses VII, who seem to have been sons of Ramesses IV and Ramesses VI respectively, were short and they obviously died without an heir.[116] Ramesses V whose mummy we have, died very young, probably of small pox. This disease might have also affected the country as an epidemic and might explain the irregularities around the burial of Ramesses V.[117]

It can be concluded that dynastic coincidence and the structure and size of the royal families of Ramesside Egypt clearly did not contribute to stability but were an almost permanent source of volatility. While foreign pressure might have been added to the internal problems as suggested by Jansen-Winkeln,[118] this is not necessary to explain the problems mentioned above.

Economic Problems and Cultural Change

The significance of the economic downturn in the 20th Dynasty has been interpreted differently, either as a symptom of administrative inefficiency and corruption,[119] as being related to Libyan raids in the Theban area and maybe beyond[120] or as the effect of low Nile floods.[121] The argument that during the 20th Dynasty specific evidence for economic problems (in Thebes) is often connected to foreign interference is convincing. Whether this explains the problems in the whole country might be a bit more difficult to answer, especially as almost no evidence is available from the north of the country.

Closely related to the economic difficulties is the problem of corruption. Corruption in this case needs to be understood in a specific way. The Egyptian central government did not penetrate the lives of Egyptians in the modern sense and did not provide public services.[122] The system was mainly concerned with revenue while it provided patronage in return. Corruption can thus have two faces: failure of loyalty of a subordinate towards the patron and the failure to fulfil the function of a patron.[123] Both happened at the end of the New Kingdom. Due to economic problems, the patrons were not able to provide the help, i.e. payment of grain rations or securing a supply of raw materials for status objects such as wood for coffins. As a result, individuals took their fate in their own hands and stole from temples and tombs or reused coffins.[124]

[116] Snape (2012: 404–414).

[117] Strouhal (1996: 318); New research suggests though, that small pox did not exist 3000 years ago: see Poinar et al. (2016); Peden (2001) discusses the actual evidence around the burial.

[118] Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 132).

[119] O'Connor (1983: 229); Assmann (1999: 323), calls it "Penetrations- und Distributionskrise".

[120] Jansen-Winkeln (2002: 139).

[121] Antoine (2009: 7).

[122] Eyre (2011: 710).

[123] Eyre (2011: 704).

[124] See Cooney (2018), for the reuse of coffins; Vernus (1993: 131–134) for a case of theft in a temple in Elephantine.

The problem of corruption has a close connection to the cultural changes related to "personal piety" or the crisis of values,[125] where the human patron is replaced by a god. In the difficult situation of the 20th Dynasty when the human patrons did not function anymore, an interdependency took effect, enhancing both the decline of traditional values and the power of the central state, placing the gods over the humans. Furthermore, the relationship to local gods might have enhanced (or made it more acceptable) for the fragmentation of the country in the Third Intermediate Period.

Imperial Overstretch

One further factor, much discussed as a reason for the demise of empires, is the imperial overstretch. For Egypt, this seems not to have been an important factor *per se* as the empire lasted for several centuries with a size that varied only slightly over time. An imperial overstretch can only be understood in relation to the smaller resources of Egypt during the late Ramesside Period in combination with the more volatile international situation sketched out above.

5 Conclusion

The end of the New Kingdom is a pivotal moment in Egyptian history. Changes affected the political as well as the cultural sphere and the impact was permanent. Many potential reasons can be brought forward to explain the process and it is often difficult to judge the causalities, mainly due to the nature and fragmented state of the available evidence. Knapp and Manning's dictum that "we must expect a complicated and multifaceted rather than simple explanatory framework[126]" has clearly to be observed. The overview below gives the most important factors and events following the considerations outlined above.

1. The end of New Kingdom Egypt can only be explained as the final point of a process lasting more than 150 years, ending in a probably quite dramatic collapse, changing the country forever. It started with the appearance of the Libyans and Sea Peoples as strong enemies in the early 19th Dynasty coinciding with the long life and reign of Ramesses II and his large number of offspring.
2. Both endogenous and exogenous factors played a role, and the end of the New Kingdom cannot be explained by one group of factors alone. It is the combination of internal problems and external pressure that brought down the system of the New Kingdom.

[125] Vernus (1993: 193); It needs to be mentioned that the personal piety had also aspects which might have opposed corruption as doing good deeds is an important element to be rewarded by the god in return. Assmann (1999: 271).

[126] Knapp and Manning (2016: 100).

3. Following the reign of Merenptah, a first period of internal instability affects Egypt until Sethnakht can stabilize the country once more. This instability can be explained by internal processes, especially the dangers of a complex succession crisis but external factors cannot be entirely ruled out.
4. Probably due to climatic reasons, the Libyans, long time neighbors in the desert regions west of Egypt begin to fight their way into Egypt. While Egypt was victorious in the known battles, Libyans settled in Egypt (or were settled in Egypt), and at the same time served as mercenaries in the Egyptian army while they continued to pose a permanent military threat to the Egyptian state. The Libyans seem to have had a much bigger importance in bringing down the Egyptian state than the Sea Peoples.
5. The reign of Ramesses III can be seen as a turning point. During his reign the largest battles we know of, against the Libyans and the Sea Peoples took place. In the aftermath of the battles, larger numbers of Libyans and other foreigners were settled in Egypt, which later were to take over power. Furthermore, internal economic problems became obvious. And no matter whether really caused by the Sea Peoples or not, it is this period which sees the Late Bronze Age order collapse, having an impact on international trade. The reign ends with the murder of the king and problems in succession leading to 5 kings in about 25 years with alternating sons and grandsons of Ramesses III.
6. The later 20th Dynasty is characterized by kings that seem not to have had considerable resources available. Short reigns with disease striking do not enhance the situation. The weakness leads to the persistence of Libyan raids and the loss of the Levant and its resources. Climatic change in the Eastern Mediterranean might have had an additional influence on the situation in the Levant, which may have made it more difficult to uphold the permanent Egyptian presence in the region.
7. During the Ramesside Period internal processes of cultural change turn out to be favorable to the take-over of power by a Libyan military class and the acceptance of the political fragmentation of the country. This process (esp. personal piety and the loss of importance of the institution of kingship) might at least partially be rooted in the problems in succession and short reigns of several kings. Potentially also lost battles that we do not know about may have contributed to this process.
8. The final blow to an already weakened state came at the end of the New Kingdom. Even though we do not know all the details, it is likely that violent events quickly changed the situation and Libyans who already held important positions in the military took over the rulership.

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The End of the Neo-Assyrian Empire

Simonetta Ponchia

Assyria became a proto-imperial power in the ninth cent BC (under king Aššurnasirpal II, r. 883–859 BC) and expanded afterwards during the eighth and seventh centuries as a territorial empire of unprecedented size and highly developed organization, with division in provinces and institutionalized administrative procedures, until its final collapse in 612 BC, under assault by Babylonian and Median troops.[1]

This collapse is dramatically portrayed in a letter from the periphery of the empire; it was written in—but seemingly never sent from—the northern town of Tušhan, situated in the Upper Tigris valley, where an Assyrian administrative office seems still to have been in function in 611 BC, i.e. soon after the fall of Nineveh, while frantic, but vain, resistance was being organized in the west. The Assyrian official in Tušhan, who was charged with the task of organizing chariot troops, desperately claimed that he could not find anyone and closed his message with one of the most impressive epitaphs on the end of the empire: *mu-a-tú ina* ŠÀ-*bi il-la-ka la-a* 1-*en* [*ú-še-za-ab*] *ep-šá-ak*, "Death will come out of it! No one [will escape]. I am done".[2]

The letter is not dated but has been associated with an entry in the Babylonian Chronicle (no. 3, ll. 53–55) which narrates the conquest of the northern town and province:

[1] On the trajectory of the Assyrian kingdom and empire see Frahm (2017); Most recently Liverani (2018) with previous bibliography.

[2] Text and translation after the edition of Parpola (2008: 87f.) (text no ZT 22); Cf. MacGinnis and Matney (2009).

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> In the 15th year (of Nabopolassar = 611 BC), in the month Tammuz, the king of Babylon [mustered his troops] and went to Assyria. [He marched about] imperiously [in Ass]yria and conquered the [citie]s of T[u]šha[n ...] and *Šu*[*br*]*ia*. They took [their people] as captives and [carried away] a hea[vy] booty from them.[3]

The end of the Assyrian empire under the attack of the Babylonian and Median armies was an epochal event due to the role of arbiter of the destinies of a large part of the ancient Near East that Assyria had exercized, but, as might be expected, the sources that recount this event are mainly external and subsequent. Particularly interesting are the interpretations provided by the texts from Hellenistic Babylonia that preserve the local tradition on the fall of Assyria and that have as their main protagonist king Nabopolassar, the actual winner of the Assyro-Babylonian conflict. These texts build the myths of revenge against Assyrian cruelty and sacrilegious behaviour and mix historical facts and their distortions,[4] as also attested by Beroso. In the Classical and Biblical interpretations,[5] loaded with ideological, moral and religious conceptions and overtones, two causes appear mostly evoked: hubris and injustice that elicit divine punishment, and the corruption and decadence of manly and military valour, even combining motifs of previous narratives with some evident transformations of the historical events.[6] The devastation of a once rich, magnificent and

[3] Quoted from Parpola (2008: 13f).

[4] See the fictitious letter BM 55467 (Gerardi 1986; Da Riva 2016) for a recent reconsideration of the topic (with previous bibliography). In the text an Assyrian king, who can be identified with Sin-šar-iškun, is accused of plundering Babylon and its main temple, the Esagila, killing the elders of the town, fomenting rebellions, etc.; the god Marduk selects the Babylonian king as protagonist of rescue and revenge. It is interesting to note that the selected king comes "from the midst of the lower sea" (*ultu qereb māt tiamat šaplitum*, l. 10), i.e. from the southernmost region of Mesopotamia. The other fictitious letter, fragmentarily preserved, MMA 86.11.370A+ (Lambert 2005 no. 44), contains a sort of answer by Sin-šar-iškun, who is called king of Assyria but addresses Nabopolassar with the epithet "my lord", i.e. as a subject would do, with a re-interpretation of the historical events, although Lambert thinks that the letter is authentic and part of an attempt at negotiating a solution to the conflict by the Assyrian king. The copy is dated during the reign of Alexander Balas, i.e. around 150 BC and clearly expresses the idea that Nabopolassar is the avenger of Babylonia. This role is exalted in the text of the so-called *Nabopolassar Epic.* Grayson (1975b).

[5] The tradition of the Assyrian empire in Biblical and Classical sources has been variously considered. For the Biblical interpretation the passages of: Sofonia 2: 13f.—where the devastation of Nineveh is described in prophetic terms as punishment for the hubristic and sinful behaviour of her rulers and inhabitants—and Nahun—which prophesizes in detail the ruin of the capital of the empire that had cruelly ruled over the Judeans—are often quoted for their evocative efficacy.

[6] For a recent synthesis of Classical sources, on which a large bibliography exists, see Vlaardingerbroek (2017). Questions of major interest are when this tradition originated and how it developed. The most articulated narrative is that of Diodorus Siculus (2.24–27), which quotes Ktesias and combines elements of a mixed tradition that incorporates previous tales, such as the fall of Babylon described in Assyrian royal inscriptions. This interpretation, although erroneous, is suggestive of the re-elaboration in Greek literature of autochthonous Mesopotamian motifs. In this light the uncertain attribution to Phocylides of Miletus in the 6th cent. BC of the following fragment would

powerful city, such as Nineveh, also became a metaphor for changing human destinies.[7] These documents, although biased, attest to the fact that the end of the Assyrian empire had a worldwide impact, which changed the equilibrium of an area extending from Egypt to Iran, to Arabia, the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea, and provided the basis for the fundamental concept of the *translatio imperii*, which is obviously linked to the theme of the end of empires and their heritage.[8]

Regrettably, contemporaneous and local sources allow us to draw only a partial sketch of the last years of Assyria, and many questions concerning the remote and immediate causes of the final catastrophe remain unanswered. Explanations have been variously sought in an economic and demographic crisis, possibly also enhanced by climatic adversities,[9] excessive military efforts in various directions and especially in occasion of the Babylonian and Elamite wars some decades before, excessive exploitation of the provinces, etc.. Various causes probably combined and together contributed to determine a situation in which more immediate causes—such as the dynastic crisis in Assyria and the Babylonian rebellion—brought about the final catastrophe. These last interconnected causes opened the way to a third cause:[10] the defection of the Medes, who had provided troops for the Assyrian army and now directed them against their former lords.

attest to an early image of weak Assyrian kings: "A small town on a cliff that is well governed is stronger than foolish Nineveh" (Diehl 1949, frg. 4; quoted from Vlaardingerbroek 2017). On the tradition from Herodotus to Ktesia and on the influence of the Greek tradition in Berossus see Bichler (2004). The characterization of Assurbanipal/Sardanapalos as the last king of Assyria, weak and inclined to pleasure, was well spread in the classical literature as exemplified by the famous epitaph, inviting to enjoy the pleasures of life, attributed to Sardanapalos in Strabo (Geography 14.5.9) and other authors. Although Assyria is considered the first empire and to have lasted for very long time, her long history is extremely sketchy. As discussed in Rollinger (2011), this is already evident in Ktesias's fragments, which describe the end of Sardanapalos in his besieged capital, where he had lived like a woman. Images and motifs filter till late antiquity and are used in historical interpretations such as that of Orosius who describes the figures of Ninus, Semiramis and Sardanapalus (depicted as an effeminate character) as the chronological pillars of Assyrian monarchy which was the first of four empires and lasted for 1160 years, but does not narrate events from this long time span. Similar motifs were used in Pompeius Trogos' work which depicted Sardanapalos as behaving like a woman and an image of the empire's fall into decadence, although the events of the long Assyrian empire are not narrated.

[7] Still inspiring much later authors as illustrated by the description of the ruins of Nineveh by William Kenneth Loftus in *Travels and Researches in Chaldea and Susiana*, 1857, as an image of the fulfilment of Biblical prophecies (p. 24).

[8] See for instance Wiesehöfer (2003); Liverani (2018: chap. 27). With previous bibliography.

[9] For a recent consideration of this issue, see Schneider and Adalı (2016). With previous bibliography.

[10] Babylonian kingship was never completely eradicated by the Assyrians, although they dominated the country, even when the title of king of Babylon was taken by the Assyrian king, or when it was attributed to a king's of Assyria son or brother in subordinate position.

1 Looking for Premises of Collapse

The quite abundant Assyrian sources of the last two centuries of the empire's existence offer a wider perspective on the last events and their causes since they reveal mechanisms of power management implemented by the Assyrians and reactions to this system and to the spreading across the empire of the image of the crown and principles of loyalty. Particularly significant are the texts dated to Assurbanipal's reign (669–631 BC), that, although lacking for his last years, provide data concerning especially the Babylonian problem.

Among the inscriptions that record and celebrate Assurbanipal's campaigns, the inscription for the Ištar temple, dated on internal criteria to around 638 BC, appears to be a comprehensive view of his achievements, almost a king's legacy. The description is organized in two parts: the first describes the centre of the territorial empire with an account of the care for temples in various towns of Assyria and Babylonia; the second part outlines the wide extension of the empire and the "marginalization" of its periphery whose rulers are described as defeated and who were forcefully overcome or spontaneously submitted.[11] They appear to constitute a pacified world that encircles Assyria, but over whom control cannot be directly exercized, thus located outside of the provincial system and also revealing the limits of Assyrian expansion and, in some cases at least, potential dangers.[12] The conceptualization of the empire is in any case universalistic, insofar as Assyria is the arbiter of the destinies of all the known countries, and theological, insofar as divine support grants success to the king who reveres and accomplishes the divine will—and as the inversion of the more usual narrative sequence with the extensive description of temple construction/restoration before military campaigns also suggests. In this view the episode of the rebellion of the Cimmerian leader Tugdammi and the punishment the gods inflicted

[11] RINAP 5/1 23. These "external" countries are: Egypt, Tyre and Arwad on the Phoenician coast, Hilakku (Cilicia), Lydia, Mannea, Elam and Gambulu, some Arab tribes, Parsumaš (Persians), Urarṭu, the Nabateans and the kings of the Persian Gulf region, Tabal and the Cimmerians. A particular case is that of Babylonia.

[12] The case of Egypt is an interesting example. In the inscription only the conquest of the royal city of Thebes and booty from the town are referred to, before the paragraph on the punishment of Phoenician and Cilician rebel rulers. The situation was however more complex, since Assyria supported the prince of the Delta Necho in his fight against the Kushite dynasty, although his loyalty faltered on some occasions. Necho's son, Psammetichus I of Sais, who had been taken hostage to the Assyrian court to be sent back as a faithful ruler, took advantage of Assyrian support to unify the northern region and take control of Thebes thanks to the Assyrian army, founding the 26th Egyptian dynasty. It seems however that he afterwards profited from the Babylonian civil war to free himself from the Assyrian yoke. He received the support of another rebel against Assyrian rule: the Lydian ruler Guggu—i.e. the Gyges of the Herodotean history—whose vicissitudes are also only summarily narrated in the present inscription. This connection contributed to inaugurate a policy of recruitment of foreign troops, especially Carian and Ionian, and of relations with the Mediterranean coasts (see in general Perdu 2010: 140-144; more in details on the Egyptian campaigns Onasch 1994: 58–161.)

on him was considered worthy of special elaboration as a premise to the occasion the inscription commemorates:[13] the restoration of the Emašmaš temple of Mullissu/Ištar at Niniveh (ca. 640–639 BC).

This conceptualization of the empire is to be considered together with other more concrete results of imperial expansion, i.e. its multiethnic character, the plurality of relationships, and the effort put into the instillation and diffusion of sentiments of loyalty to and faith in the legitimate dynasty to contrast opposition and resistance. The ideological apparatus as well as the practical opportunities offered by the imperial dimension can be considered as fundamental for the adhesion of local elites.

The problem of maintaining their support for the dynasty was particularly acute during and after the failure of the attempt to solve the Babylonian problem through the institution of a twin monarchy in the southern capital under a brother of Assurbanipal, and the ensuing long fratricidal war, which also divided the southern regions. A small group of letters relating to this phase concern the southernmost scenario of Uruk, a city that had an important role in the last years of Assyria, since it was seemingly the hometown of Nabopolassar, the Babylonian king finally responsible for Assyrian collapse.

During the reign of Assurbanipal and especially during the revolt of his brother and king of Babylon Šamaš-šumu-ukin (652–648 BC), Uruk, like other Babylonian cities,[14] had sided with the Assyrians. Letters were sent by Assurbanipal to the governors of the town, Nabû-ušabši[15] and, later, Kudurru—who succeeded to the governorship after the war, in 647 BC—and to Uruk's citizens. These letters illustrate two important points: first, the organization of the network of military intervention in which the governors and officials of other provinces had an important role in a common effort coordinated with the local and the central governments;[16] second, the role of urban communities and elites linked by family

[13] According to the narrative, after his betrayal of the pact with the Assyrian king, Tugdamme is terror stricken and the gods inflict on him physical and psychological suffering. He has been identified with Lygdamis known from classical sources. On the episode see Lanfranchi (1990: 115–120).

[14] Kutha, Nippur and Ur. See Ito in Parpola (2018) (SAA 21): xxi–xxiii.

[15] As reconstructed by Frame (1992: 157ff.); and most recently by Ito (in Parpola 2018, SAA 21: xxii f) on the basis of ABL 1106, at a certain point, perhaps at the beginning of Šamaš-šumu-ukin's revolt, Nabû-ušabši was taken by force by the rebels to Babylon, but, before leaving Uruk, he ordered an official of his to request the help of the governor of Arrapha and Marduk-šarru-uṣur, "chariot driver of the queen". SAA 21 22–25 (= ABL 273, 543, 1108, 1244 a letter known in various copies) mentions, according to Parpola, the sending of reinforcements by Assurbanipal to Nabû-ušabši. These reinforcements included, in addition to the above mentioned officials, Nuraya, the governor of Mazamua and Lahiru, and the captains Bel-eṭir and Arbaya with 200 horses. Nabû-ušabši was saved in Babylon thanks to the intervention of his maternal uncle, but his brother Sin-ibni was killed (Frame 1992: 159). Other letters also attest to the active pro-Assyrian role of Uruk during Šamaš-šumu-ukin's rebellion: ABL 1437, 622+1279, CT 54 507.

[16] See ABL 1006. ABL 1028 attests to the reaction to the concentration of troops in Uruk (Frame 1992: 160). It seems moreover that the attempt to install in Uruk a governor loyal to Šamaš-šumu-ukin, Nabû-naṣir, failed. Other letters, such as ABL 1108 (Frame 1992: 160f), show that Uruk acted

ties.[17] This is also revealed by the formula of address of the royal letters to Uruk, where the citizens "great and small" are indicated as addressees together with the governor. In a nutshell, this type of address hints at the problems local administrators had to face: they were pressed between local interests and loyalty to the crown, they needed to obtain and exhibit the trust and favour of the king and to maintain those of their fellow citizens, kin or tribal members.[18] In the ideological, and to a certain extent also practical scheme of the imperial government, a direct relation was established between the king and his subjects; as evidenced by the letters sent by Assurbanipal to Babylonian citizens during the civil war and, more in general, by the so-called loyalty oaths, all were responsible for behaving correctly and protecting the king.[19]

As is well known, in the last days of Assyria a key role was played by the army of the Medes, whose fragmented tribes, according to Classical sources, had been unified by Cyaxares (Umakištar), and whose development towards a "secondary state" organization was due to their relationships with the Assyrians.[20] The most explicit documents showing

in its turn as reference point and relée with Assyria for the southernmost region, i.e. the town of Ur and the Gurasimmu region, which were also targets of Šamaš-šumu-ukin's attempts to dismantle Assyrian control. It was seemingly Kudurru, possibly second in command to Nabû-ušabši, that intervened in the region together with the forces of the governors of Arrapha and Mazamua (ABL 754 + CT 54 250, Frame 1992: 161). Not only did they organize military interventions, but also had an important intermediary role in local context, as attested by ABL 517 (SAA 21 27) in which the king entrusts Nabû-ušabši with the task of commending Bel-ušallim of Bit-Amukani for his pro-Assyrian stance and summoning him to the Nineveh court. The message implies the lack of a direct link with Bit-Amukani, and the intention to create it. Moreover, in the royal message there is a reference to the elders of Bit-Amukani, thus hinting at the construction of a larger consensus around the Assyrian cause.

[17] The latter was a complex matter that can be here only mentioned. It also involved royal families, through marriages with foreign princesses and members of the defeated rulers' families, such as the discussed examples of Iabâ, Atalia, or Naqi'a, seemingly western or Aramean princesses who married Assyrian kings (cf. Svärd 2015: 40–48, with previous bibliography, and for Assurbanipal's family Novotny and Singletary 2009); particularly important were also the relations between the Elamite court and major Babylonian families such as the Gahal (cf. Waters 2006).

[18] On this theme see the extensive investigation of Richardson (2016); in particular cf. SAA 17 105 and SAA 18 70, 85, 86 "on pro- and anti-Assyrian debate". The scholar observes that Babylonia offers the best example of political crises deriving from the difficult position of the ruling class: "because its cultural ties to and historical contests with Assyria were deeper than other ruled places; and because Babylonia more than other parts of the empire gives a few cases in which the quality of being Babylonian vis-à-vis non-Babylonians (and especially the Assyrians) is occasionally voiced." (p. 63).

[19] On royal letters to Babylonian see Ito in Parpola (2018: xiv f); on treaties Ponchia (2014) with previous bibliography.

[20] According to Liverani (2003) the specific location of the Median pastoral tribes along the road from Kermanshah to Hamadan was the main reason for the Assyrian military intervention in the area and "was the basic factor for the transition of the poor pastoral tribes of the Zagros into rich and powerful chiefdoms (...) and attracted by the alien model of the lowland states" (p. 6). On the relations between

an institutionalized relation between the Assyrian dynasty and the Medes are the treaties of loyalty sworn by the "city-lords" of these Zagric polities in 672 BC.[21] As clearly demonstrated by the copy of the same type of treaty recently unearthed in the western province of Kunalia,[22] this was not an exceptional practice, but the treaties sworn by the Medes nevertheless show that the local elites—and not the Assyrian governor and establishment as in the western province—were recognized as the institutional interlocutors. This was certainly due to the presence of the Medes in the Assyrian military ranks,[23] but also seems to imply that they had a special role in the Zagros, somehow comparable with that hypothesized for the southern enclave of Uruk. Lanfranchi (2003) points out that their adhesion to the Assyrian cause had been crucial during the conflict against Urarṭu and continued afterwards, especially to guarantee the delivery of a fundamental resource such as horses—in addition, as noted by Liverani, to the control of access to the Iranian plateau. These reasons induced the Assyrians to preserve "both the connection between local rule and governed territory and the intimate relationship between man and land".[24] The local rulers maintained the right to dynastic succession and mediated imperial power by exercising their rule over the population, that was not subjected to the extensive deportations that had been inflicted on other areas. Against this scenario, the alliance of the Medes with the Babylonians reported in the Chronicles and the role of Cyaxares as leader of a unified Median force represent the dramatic failure of the Assyrian attempt to create another bulwark of the empire through the special treatment and "political Assyrianization" of local Median elites.[25]

If the Assyrian communication and intelligence system was well organized and the army trained to intervene successfully in various sectors to quell rebellions and support faithful allies and subjects, it appears that their adhesion to the empire was fundamental for maintaining the possibility of intervention in all sectors and to avoid the spreading of hostility and the constitution of alternative leaderships.

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the Assyrians and the Zagros and Median polities and elites see the detailed analysis of Lanfranchi (2003) and Lanfranchi (2021), with previous bibliography.

[21] SAA 2 6. Lanfranchi (2003: 108–112).

[22] Lauinger (2012).

[23] For the hypothesis that they were body-guards of the crown prince see Liverani (1995) and Lanfranchi (1998).

[24] Lanfranchi (2003: 112).

[25] Liverani (2003) points out that after the fall of the Assyrian empire the major Median centres appear to have been peacefully abandoned and that even later sources show the existence of a loose leadership of Median lords; he concludes that the "dark age" of the period 610-550 BC reveals that "The Zagros polities were true and proper "secondary" states in the sense that their very existence was dependent on relationships with the empire" (p. 9). On the institutional and political organization of the Medes see also Rollinger (2010).

2 Assyrian Dynastic Succession and Babylonian Elites

During the last years of Assurbanipal's reign and after his death, it became even more difficult to maintain this faltering equilibrium. From a royal grant from Nineveh (SAA 12 35) we apprehend that the son and heir of Assurbanipal, Aššur-etel-ilani (630–627 BC),[26] was installed on the throne by the chief eunuch Sin-šumu-lišir.[27] This act can be considered vis-à-vis the attempts to regulate and guarantee the succession of Assurbanipal to the throne of his father Esarhaddon through rules meticulously defined in a pact sworn by all the subjects of the king, some decades before.[28] In the light of the provisions of that document, the behaviour of the chief eunuch Sin-šumu-lišir, who supported the accession of Aššur-etel-ilani son of Assurbanipal, apparently still a minor, seems to have been perfectly correct.[29] It is not clear though, how exactly Aššur-etel-ilani was related to the other contender to the throne, Sin-šarru-iškun,[30] who also was a son (or grandson/nephew) of Assurbanipal. We wonder if Sin-šarru-iškun's was a regular succession after the death of Aššur-etel-ilani, but hindered by the rebellion of Sin-šumu-lišir, or whether Sin-šarru-iškun rebelled against Aššur-etel-ilani's succession, possibly because he was an elder son of Assurbanipal, but not son of the king's principal wife, or not designated as heir. It is also possible that Aššur-etel-ilani was in fact the son of an heir designated by Assurbanipal but prematurely deceased. The circumstances are also obscure in which the eunuch Sin-šumu-

[26] PNA 1/I: 183–4 (J. Brinkman).

[27] PNA 3/1: 1148 (R. Mattila); Tadmor (2001); Da Riva (2001); Ambos (2009: 6). There is a possible reference to him, but which does not name him explicitly, in the literary text of the Nabopolassar Epic: in ii 12 there is mention of the powerful eunuch who from the roof of his palace in Kutha implores that Nabopolassar spares him. In response his execution is ordered: "Let the Assyrian be killed!" (Grayson 1975b, 82).

[28] The pact (*adê*) sworn for the succession of Assurbanipal to Esarhaddon's throne includes clauses for the protection of the dynasty, foreshadowing particularly adverse circumstances. It considers the event of Esarhaddon's death while his sons are still minors and the murder of Assurbanipal, prohibits giving support to the murderer, and orders rebellion against the usurper and enthronement of a son of Assurbanipal (SAA 2 6: ll. 237–248). Furthermore, if this solution is not available, the pact imposes waiting for a posthumous son of Esarhaddon or Assurbanipal to grow up, and then putting him on the throne (ll. 249–258). Cadet lines appear to be excluded from succession.

[29] The episode is narrated in the introduction of a royal donation of tax-exempted land to Ṭab-šar-papahi, a cohort commander of Sin-šumu-lišir, the chief eunuch (here quoted in the SAA 12 translation): "[Af]te[r my father and begetter had depa]rted, [no father brought me up or taught me to spre]ad my wing[s, no m]other cared for me or saw to my educa[tion], Sin-š[umu-lišir], the chief eunuch, one who had deserved well of [my] father (...), installed [me] safely on the throne of my father and begetter and made the people of Assyria, great and small [.... keep watch over m]y kingship during my minority (...)" (SAA 12 35: 7–11). The text continues with reference to an attempted rebellion. The date of the document is unfortunately broken, and only doubtfully identified with the eponym year of Marduk-šarru-uṣur, governor of Que. This post-canonical eponym on the other hand has been variously dated to: 636 (Falkner), 631 (Reade), 627 (Parpola) (cf. PNA 4, 265).

[30] PNA 3/I: 1143–5 (J. Novotny); for a historical sketch, see RlA 12: 522–4 (H. Schaudig).

lišir ascended the throne presumably in 627/626 BC, perhaps after the death of the young legitimate king.

The sources at our disposal do not provide details of this dynastic crisis or about the support the contenders had. Assyrian royal inscriptions are few and much less informative than those of the preceding kings. Babylonian Chronicles describe the events from the Babylonian perspective: the accession of Nabopolassar to the throne of Babylon, the hostilities against Assyria and, with a gap of some years, the reign of the Babylonian king,[31] including the destruction of Assyrian cities with the help of the Medes. Other sources are variously, but not directly, useful to illuminate reasons and developments of the Assyrian loss of power: the King List from Uruk (another later document, drafted in Seleucid times) which preserves information on the sequence of the kings,[32] and the legal and economic documents stemming from Babylonian cities, which were dated according to the regnal years of the kings of either Assyria or Babylonia, thus revealing who had control of those cities. They are useful for reconstructing some precise dates since they can be anchored to the Julian calendar thanks to connections with astronomical diaries.[33]

Combining the available sources, it appears that after the death of Assurbanipal in Assyria (presumably 631/630 BC) and that of Kandalanu in Babylonia, which occurred before the 8th month of 627 BC,[34] various protagonists took the stage:

Aššur-etel-ilani[35]: 630/31-627/26?
Sin-šumu-lišir: 630/31-626/25? (as tutor of Aššur-etel-ilani and then king)

[31] Namely: Chronicle 2 includes the 3rd year of Nabopolassar's reign (till 622 BC) and, after a gap, the events from year 10 of Nabopolassar (i.e. from 616 BC) (Grayson 1975a, no. 2 = BM 25127). In the first preserved part the rebellion against Assyrian dominion in northern Babylonia is narrated. The Assyrian attack was initially successful, in particular in recovering control of Nippur, and forced Nabopolassar to retreat to Uruk. However the Assyrian attack of Babylon resulted in a setback and their sovereignty was no more recognized; thus for one year "there was no king in the land", until Nabopolassar took the throne of Babylon. In Nabopolassar's first year the Assyrian army was victorious in various occasions in northern Babylonia. The account of the following years is fragmentary and includes reference to the rebellion of Der against the Assyrians. Chronicle 3 (Grayson 1975a, no. 3 = BM 21901) narrates military operations beginning with the offensive launched by Nabopolassar in the 10th year of his reign (see below). See also Zawadzki (1988, 1995).

[32] Grayson (1969, 1980: 97–98); Waerzeggers (2015: 203–204).

[33] Walker (1999).

[34] Na'aman (1991: 244). The identity of Kandalanu has not been established and he has been considered either an Assyrian puppet king or even Assurbanipal himself, with a Babylonian name. The possibility should be considered that he was linked to the Assyrian dynasty by parentage and not simply by dependence ties.

[35] Na'aman (1991) observes that there is clear continuity with the preceding reign insofar as he dedicated inscriptions in southern Babylonia.

Sin-šarru-iškun: 628/627-620? recognized as king of Babylonia; 628?-612 king of Assyria[36]

Nabopolassar: 626-605 king of Babylonia.[37]

In this dramatic phase, dates are crucial in order to reconstruct the development of the events and the question of legitimacy. Especially crucial are the years 628 and 627 BC, defined as kingless in the Babylonian Chronicle. From the Uruk king list and the legal documents it can be argued that both Sin-šumu-lišir and Sin-šarru-iškun were in control of some Babylonian cities although there was no king of Babylon *de iure*.[38] The eunuch Sin-šumu-lišir is mentioned as king in the date formulas of some documents from Babylon, Nippur and Ru'a (in the territory of Nippur), and seemingly Sippar, dated up to the 6th month of his accession year. Na'aman (1991: 248) maintains that: "early in 626 Sšl rebelled and dominated northern Babylonia for several months, while approximately at the same time Npl rebelled in southern Babylonia". In Da Riva's opinion, the documents from Sippar allow us to reconstruct the temporary holding of this town by Sin-šumu-lišir, which lasted a few months (in 626 BC), before the town was retaken by Sin-šarru-iškun.[39] The latter lost the city definitely when it was conquered by Nabopolassar in 625 BC, after the whole Sippar region had been the theater of a fight between Assyrians and Babylonians in 626–625 BC.

Sin-šarru-iškun, on the other hand, is known from his own royal inscriptions and appears to have been recognized as king of Babylonia as revealed by date formulas in legal documents from various towns. In Na'aman's reconstruction he was the legitimate heir of the throne to which he ascended in 627 BC and had to face the rebellion of Sin-šumu-lišir in 626 BC, when the latter took control of some cities and was perhaps an ally of Nabopolassar. According to another perspective—which takes into account archival texts from Uruk—Sin-šarru-iškun's accession year should be dated to 628 BC, thus before the death of Kandalanu.[40]

The lack of clear-cut documents and sound chronology has led to different reconstructions that, for the sake of brevity, can be summarized as follows: according to one interpretation, Sin-šarru-iškun claimed the Babylonian throne at the death of Assurbanipal and also claimed the throne of Assyria when Aššur-etel-ilani ascended it; according to a second interpretation, Sin-šarru-iškun ascended the throne of Assyria with minor turmoils at the death of his brother, but a rebellion arose against his rule in the years

[36] According to Na'aman (1991: 245f.), he is attested in his accession year (=627 BC) in tablets from Sippar, Uruk, Babylon, Nippur.

[37] Cf. Beaulieu (1997: 367ff.) on the documents dated to *edēl bābi*, the "closure of the door", i.e. the siege of Uruk. The tradition reported by Beroso (in a fragment known through Eusebius of Cesarea) identifies Nabopolassar as a general of Sin-šarru-iškun, appointed on Sealand, and new arguments also point to an origin from Uruk (see below).

[38] Lambert (2005: 203). Cf. the documents dated "after Kandalanu".

[39] Da Riva (2001: 47).

[40] Beaulieu (1997: 385).

badly documented by the Chronicles (from 623 BC). In either case, the Assyrian internal struggle for the throne chronologically overlapped and interconnected with the mounting Babylonian rebellion, giving fuel to the anti-Assyrian party in Babylonian cities.

Let us return to the southern Assyrian outpost of Uruk. Nabopolassar (Nabû-aplu-uṣur) was seemingly a member of the town's aristocracy. It has been hypothesized that he was actually a son of the Kudurru who had served as governor (*šakin ṭēmi*) of Uruk under Assurbanipal.[41] From the dates of some archival texts it has been deduced that the town was in Nabopolassar's hands when he took the throne of Babylonia in 626 BC and until his 3rd year of reign, when the town was besieged by the Assyrians.[42] Some letters from Nineveh possibly date from this period and corroborate the hypothesis that the pro-Assyrian party had at a certain point opposed Nabopolassar, re-taken control of the town and therefore caused his reaction and the siege.[43]

The case of Uruk, but also those of other towns, reveals how in the ever-fragmented situation of Babylonia, Assyrian control was based on the capacity to maintain in function a network of communication and consensus, and intervening quickly and successfully to sustain the pro-Assyrian parties and their interests. Uruk was seemingly a crucial enclave to keep the kingship of Babylonia under control and represented an Assyrian bulwark in the south towards the region of Sealand—which was particularly difficult to keep under authority because of its geographical and social landscapes—and had seemingly a role also in the relations with Elam.[44] This system, that exploited local forces, required anyway the employment of considerable resources to back the pro-Assyrian parties. It was evidently exposed to various risks, as the repeated Babylonian rebellions show, and it seems that renewed anti-Assyrian struggles in Babylonia determined a progressive deterioration

[41] Jursa (2007) suggests this connection on the basis of the letter ABL 469. Kudurru (sobriquet of Nabû-kudurri-uṣur), the governor of Uruk, did at a certain point betray the Assyrian party and even his memory was desecrated by the pro-Assyrian fraction when they regained the upper hand. During the last years of Assyria Uruk again rebelled and Nabopolassar took the leadership. Frahm (2017) concludes more cautiously but on the same line: "Even though there is currently no final proof for this scenario, it is all but obvious that Nabopolassar had indeed a close relationship with Uruk."

[42] These documents are dated *ina edēl bābi* which corresponds to years 3-5 of Nabopolassar. Other documents are dated from the 5th to 7th year of Sin-šarru-iškun, again *ina edēl bābi*. This allows a synchronism to be established between Nabopolassar 3–5 and Sin-šarru-iškun 5–7, years during which the town was probably besieged by the Assyrians (Beaulieu 1997: 379).

[43] ABL 815 was sent to Urukean citizens in Assyria and asked for a military intervention; and ABL 1387, sent by the Urukeans to the king, seemingly Sin-šarru-iškun, informed that they had closed the gate of Uruk and embraced the Assyrian cause. Beaulieu (1997) proposes the contestualization of the letters within the events of 623 BC and the Assyrian counteroffensive.

[44] In Chronicle 2 (ll. 16f) Nabopolassar is credited with a pious enterprise, that of returning to Susa the gods that the Assyrians had brought to Uruk (probably at the time of Assurbanipal's campaign in 647 BC). A different perspective is suggested by the colophon of a Seleucid era tablet (Hunger 1968, no. 107, discussed in Da Riva 2016, 213 and 2017, 78), which says that the tablet was written on the basis of those that Nabopolssar had carried off from Uruk and that Kidin-Anu of Uruk had seen and copied in Elam and brought back to Uruk (text AO 64 51, Linssen 2004: 175f.)

of the Assyrian political, ideological and economic network in the south. In this situation, internal dynastic rivalries and the attempts to gain the favour of elites and cities by different Assyrian competitors for the throne could evidently have further weakened Assyrian grasp on Babylonia and opened the way to an alternative leadership, which in its turn stemmed from the same Assyrian organization of local power.

3 The Empire's Overthrow

The first phases of the war between Nabopolassar and the Assyrians took place in Babylonia, since the Assyrians tried to overthrow Nabopolassar's kingship. Our main source, the Babylonian Chronicles, incompletely covers the following events, but it seems that important cities such as Der passed to the Babylonians and that in a short time-span the Assyrian towns were attacked. When the Chronicles' narrative resumes, the Medes appear on the scene. The Medes' offensive was fatal to the enfeebled Assyrians, especially because the Medes were well acquainted with the Assyrian military machine.[45] Their attack on Arrapha (modern Kerkuk) in 615 BC—after the battle the Babylonians had fought in the region in 616—was an important contribution to the Babylonian strategy, since this city and her province appear to have always functioned as an Assyrian military headquarter for the operations in the south-east and as a fundamental connection with the Assyrian core.[46] According to the Babylonian Chronicle, Arrapha's capitulation was followed, in the next year, by the conquest of Tarbiṣu—located a few kilometers north of Nineveh, and therefore by a direct menace to the capital and by the march southwards to besiege and sack Assur, the religious capital, ancient seat of the Assyrian dynasty, and a

[45] Lanfranchi (2003: 107) stresses that the Assyrians had been primarily interested in blocking the Urartian menace by strengthening the Zagric array and recruiting especially Median warriors with their horses. In Lanfranchi (2021: 144), the scholar stresses the intimate connection of the Medes with the Assyrian imperial government and dismisses the idea of the formation of a strong Median state: "In my opinion, their decisive intervention in favour of the Babylonian Nabopolassar was most probably a devastating act of rebellion. It was the rebellion of military leaders who had since long served *in* the Assyrian army and *inside* the Assyrian empire according to the well-established and since long accepted rules of the Assyrian *adê*-system."

[46] Various letters from the Ninevite archive concern this town. From the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II originate letters dealing with logistic issues, such as concentration of deportees (SAA 19 81 concerning the feeding of deportees; SAA 1 10, SAA 15, 16, 18—referring to 4100 prisoners in town—19), the communication system and military movements (SAA 19, 81 on the trip of the governor to Der and movements of the Elamites, 119, 125; SAA 1 94 and 97, SAA 5 199, 227, 229), provision of horses (SAA 13 88, 98, 103, 109), contribution to works in the capital (SAA 1 64), relée with the centre (in the later text SAA 16 137). The letters dated to Assurbanipal, mentioned above, testify that this role continued during these phases, despite the few attestations preserved.

cosmopolitan centre where people of Egyptian and Zagric origin appear among the protagonists of the town's economic life.[47]

The archaeological evidence from Assur shows the violence of the attack, which began with the enemies breaching the Tabira Gate, situated in the northern section of the walls. The plunder and burning of temples and buildings followed and even reached the royal graves beneath the ancient palaces.[48] Traces of destruction and fire are also visible in the residential area, as well as of barricades within the town's streets. Interesting are the clear indications that the city was prepared for an attack, since parts of the state buildings had been transformed into grain reserves—the burnt contents of which were still visible to the excavators.[49]

According to the Babylonian chronicle it was next to the walls of Assur that the Medes stipulated peace and alliance with the Babylonians, which sanctioned the Median defection from their loyalty to the Assyrian dynasty to acknowledgment of the Babylonian one, as well as the recognizance of the Median's role by the Babylonians, and possibly negotiated the terms of intervention and division of booty.

That the Median contribution was fundamental is also suggested by the other front of military operations, that shows how already in 616 BC Assyria was being closed in a grip that clasped both the Tigris and the Euphrates fronts. The Chronicle records a Babylonian offensive in 616 BC. that the Assyrians tried to stop from the fortress of Gablini.[50] The fortress was however taken, Mannean auxiliary troops captured, and Egyptian help was insufficient to recover this position. Babylonian conquest of, or the adhesion to Babylonian rule by towns and provinces under attack met with some resistance, as the opposition of the Middle Euphrates area to Nabopolassar in 613 BC attests. The Babylonian army had to overcome the resistance organized around the Euphratic fortresses and towns of Rahilu and

[47] Legal texts unearthed in private houses in the citadel attest to the businesses of extended families or guilds of various professionals and of Egyptians and Hundurayu, that have been hypothetically identified with people coming from the region of Harhar, in the Zagric and Median area. In the contract WVDOG 152 I.48 rev. 5 a Madayu is attested in the village of Dur-šiddi. Their presence in town can be connected with conquests and deportations, but might also be the result of enhanced trading relations with regions whose ruling classes had special ties with Assyria. Cf. also the case of the Urukeans in Nineveh (ABL 815).

[48] Miglus (2000) with previous bibliography.

[49] Miglus (2000: 88f). Perhaps the list of cereals StAT 3 35, which has a reference to year 616—that can be taken as a *terminus post quem*—could be considered related to these operations.

[50] The site has not been identified, but was probably located in the Euphrates valley. Cf. Röllig (1997, 129) for the proposal of identifying the site with Rummuniya mentioned in Tukulti-Ninurta's II inscriptions, which would be the same place called Gabbaribani in inscriptions from Suhu.The presence of a fortress system along the Euphrates and Khabur valleys is attested in epigraphical and archaeological sources. The fortresses (*birtu*) protected the *harrān šarri*, the royal road that provided quick communications and the organization of military movements through a series of post-stations (*bēt mardēte*). On the fortification in the Khabur area see Morandi Bonacossi (1996: 129–137).

Anat. And the case of Dur-Katlimmu, discussed below, suggests that in some cases the Babylonians might have had to come to terms with local authorities and forces.

In the core region of the empire the blow was directed with determination at annihilating the centre of power. In 612 BC Nineveh, a metropolis built to be the magnificent heart of a prosperous empire, not a stronghold to be easily defended, was assaulted by joint Babylonian and Median forces, taken after 3 months of desperate resistance, largely destroyed, looted and its people massacred.[51] The reigning dynasty had no hope: Sin-šarru-iškun died and the prince Aššur-uballiṭ had to abandon the capital.

This event marks the end of the Assyrian empire, although the Assyrian prince organized a last resistance in Harran, trusting in Egyptian help,[52] but finally capitulated in 609 BC. The Babylonian Chronicle records repeated incursions into Assyrian territory, as well as in the provinces of Naṣibina and Raṣappa,[53] after 612 BC and this is supported by archeological evidence of destruction, which is visible even in the countryside.[54]

In general, it has been recognized that the destruction of the Assyrian centres in 612 BC was widespread, and was followed by what has been defined as a phase of squatters' re-occupation. The lack of a clear-cut change in material culture from the previous period and the general great impoverishment and contraction of the settled urban areas suggest that neither the Babylonians nor the Medes consistently exercized their power in the area to restructure it and assign it a place in the new organization, so that the disastrous consequences of the destruction of the system of towns that had made Assyria the core of political and economic communication and exchange were still evident a couple of centuries later in Xenophon's Anabasis.[55]

[51] Stronach (1997), by the Halzi Gate more than 200 bodies were found, killed during the last defense and buried under the fallen walls; RlA 9: 427–8 (Reade).

[52] Frahm (2017) summarizes the last Assyrian moves as follows: "If the anonymous "crown prince" mentioned in a few late documents from Dur-Katlimmu on the Khabur is indeed to be identified with Aššur-uballiṭ (thus Radner 2002: 17–18), he would have held some authority in the west for a little while. But in 610, Median and Babylonian troops drove Aššur-uballiṭ away from Ḫarran, and, after a failed attempt in 609 to reconquer the city with Egyptian help, he disappeared from the scene. The Assyrian state had finally ceased to exist."

[53] These provinces were located in the western sector of Assyrian heartland and in strategic positions. Naṣibina, modern Nusaybin, was located in the eastern side of the Khabur triangle. On the disputed identification of Raṣappa see RlA 11: 254 (Jursa); most recently Parpola (2017) with previous literature.

[54] See e.g. Curtis (2016).

[55] Reade (2003), Curtis (2003). For a critical discussion of later sources see Kuhrt (1995). Liverani (2001): 391 stresses the changing of the international equilibrium: "It was an evil fate for Assyria that the very boundary between Babylonian and Median territories, (...) passed through the core lands of Assyria.(...) [It] became a borderland between two different political orders and customs: the urbanized and bureaucratic polity of the plains, and the tribal and pastoralist polities of the mountains."

Although scarcely documented, the years from ca. 620 to 609 BC are obviously crucial to an understanding of the fall of Assyria and its immediate aftermath. The documents from the ancient capital Assur pose some interesting questions. W. Andrae, who dug the site of Assur before World War I, clearly recognized evidence of destruction and the town's subsequent deterioration, although some signs of continuity were also evident in some buildings, such as the "Große Haus"; moreover, he identified two temples that had been newly built in Babylonian style.[56] The evidence of reconstruction and resettlement has since often been discussed, but interpretations differ. Particularly interesting is the case of the temple complex designated A and N. Temple A is described by Miglus as not only a sanctuary "sondern auch ein Raum, in dem die alte kultische Tradition und die Reichsgeschichte in ständiger Erinnerung gehalten werden sollten".[57] There is also evidence for the reconstruction of some residential buildings. K. Radner has recently argued that the temple complex was not associated with reconstruction after 614 BC, but rather to a disposition of Cyrus, the Persian emperor, who about 70 years later allowed the descendants of the deported Assur elite to come back to their hometown and rebuild the temple, similarly to what happened in Jerusalem.[58]

The rich epigraphical remains from the town add useful but—at least at our present state of knowledge, not decisive—data on the situation. The main problem is the impossibility of fixing the chronology of the last years of the empire: the sequence of post-canonical eponyms is variously reconstructed and especially the years from 614 to 612 BC are disputed. This means that it is impossible to say if legal texts from the town date to before or after 614 BC, i.e. whether they might attest to the continuity of the city's life after the plunder and, most importantly, provide clues concerning the rule imposed on the town.

The documentation, epigraphical and archaeological, from Dur-Katlimmu—which had been an important centre in the Khabur valley, in an intermediate position between the Assyrian core and the Syrian provinces—is clearer in this respect. The most relevant fact is the lack of destruction traces and the apparent cultural and material continuity from the Neo- to post-Assyrian phase, which is illustrated for instance by the pottery remains from the town's main building, the "Rote Haus", which, as proved by texts unearthed there, was in use after 612 BC. Text SH 199 is dated by an eponym not attested elsewhere, Se'-ila'i, and this fact suggests that it was a post-612 eponym.[59] The same text, as stressed by K. Radner has a particular formula against the breaking of the contract referring to the *adê* of the crown prince, and the scholar hypothesizes that this formula indicates adhesion to the Assyrian dynasty and its last representative, Aššur-uballiṭ, who attempted to resist in

[56] Andrae (1938: 167), cf. Kühne (2011: 110f). But cf. discussion in Hauser (2011: 123–127).

[57] Miglus (2000: 90).

[58] Radner (2017). Schaudig (2018) criticizes the assumption that the memory and devotion to Aššur was still preserved and hypothesizes that the later temple was dedicated to Nergal.

[59] Radner (2002: 18). The author observes that there are other cases of local eponyms, namely Paší, attested at Assur, and Nabû-mar-šarri-uṣur at Guzana.

Harran. The same attitude would be expressed by the name of the eponym attested in texts from Guzana, i.e. the *turtānu* Nabû-mar-šarri-uṣur, whose name means "Nabû, protect the prince". These are tiny hints that possibly Dur-Katlimmu was not attacked by the Babylonians and Medes, although still adhering to the Assyrian cause, and that during and slightly after the attack on Nineveh there were areas, even in Assur, where some traits of an Assyrian system could be maintained—as the use of eponym dates, instead of the Babylonian ones, would suggest.

Only a few years later after the last Assyrian opposition had been defeated, contracts were drafted in Dur-Katlimmu, still according to Assyrian conventions and in Assyrian script, but dated according to the Babylonian system—as demonstrated by a small group of texts dated to the 2nd and 5th year of Nebuchadnezer, king of Babylon.[60] Considering the information of the Babylonian Chronicle and the documents from Tušhan mentioned above, we wonder if the preservation of the city was due to her sudden acknowledgment of Babylonian leadership,[61] or to the Babylonian strategy of control of the defeated country, which privileged the maintenance of some important hubs, located at the margins of what had been the ancient Assyrian core, after it had been devastated.

4 Concluding Remarks

In brief, the sources allow us to assess a series of facts, although doubts and obscurities remain. The destruction of Assyrian dominion was quick and complete, implemented by forces which originated from within the Assyrian system, despite their different ethnic and cultural characterizations.

At a general level, the progressive switch towards the preeminence of a theological interpretation of history—as is especially noticeable in Assyrian royal inscriptions from Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, is a symptom of the growing need to buttress control of the empire with an ideological apparatus which provided an artificial explanation of shared belonging to a political body personified by the ruling king. This horizon acquired special importance vis-à-vis some specific problems the king had to cope with.

The first problem was the rivalry within the royal family. This is illustrated by various revolts that during the ninth to seventh centuries involved the main cities of the Assyrian

[60] Kreppner (2016) with previous bibliography: "No. 199, a document which therefore shows that the family still had influence even after the year 612 BC. The stratigraphical context of documents Nos. 37 to 40, which document the purchases of land, on a floor of the main occupation period in Room XX prove that the 5200 m^2 residence of the Red House was in full scale use even after the Neo-Assyrian empire's fall. These documents refer to dates of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II and were definitely stored in the building before its destruction by fire. The Assyrian élite obviously survived the empire's fall"

[61] Kühne (2011, 111).

heartland, which took the side of one or other contender.[62] The participation of towns and officials of the area organized in the provincial system and especially of the so-called home provinces shows that different interests were at stake, and that the Assyrian dynasty was dependent upon a network of relations between the royal family and officialdom and urban aristocracies, especially in the kingdom's core. Sennacherib-Esarhaddon's succession was a particularly critical point and was accompanied by measures meant to secure the position of the heir apparent, such as the constitution of military corps directly at the orders of the queen mother and the crown prince,[63] but was nevertheless followed by open fighting and seemingly protracted conspiratory activity until the execution of the highest officials by Esarhaddon in 670 BC. This situation, obviously detrimental to the kingdom's cohesion, contributed to foster a climate of suspicion and rivalry within the ruling class and the town communities, as letters of denunciations dated especially to the reigns of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal show, and possibly alienated devotion to the ruling dynasty.

The other fundamental issue concerns the management of the extended empire which required optimization of the system of control and relations between the provinces and the centre, particularly important in some sensitive enclaves. The Assyrian monarchs and their functionaries organized an innovative and quite efficient system as far as communications and logistics were concerned, as can be gauged from the letters sent from the provinces to the capital, and that remained the basis for later imperial organizations. At the same time it is evident that this system came up against the limits represented by the necessity of educating a ruling class, civilian and military, in order to guarantee its absorption of the principles of Assyrian imperial ideology as well as the loyalty to the reigning dynasty. The diffusion of the symbols of Assyrian rule, the imposition of the Assyrian language as the administrative language in a multilingual territory, and the spread of Assyro-Babylonian culture were the means employed in addition to more immediately effective ones, such as deportations and the education at the Assyrian court of the offspings of the local elites, inclusion in the Assyrian core cities of foreign groups fully integrated in the civic and economic life of the urban community, as attested by the Egyptians in Assur, and training troops to fill the ranks of an armed force that Assyria alone could not sustain.

The problem was particularly acute in some areas due to their position in the geo-political landscape and their socio-economic and institutional structures, such as in the Zagric sector and Babylonia, where—although these contexts differed notably from one another—the Assyrians chose a partly similar strategy of control. The Assyrian reliance on local elites in the Zagros sector might be considered in comparison to the special relation with Uruk in southern Babylonia: both areas provided a support to Assyrian organization within their territories, and they were expected to continue during the worsening of relations with Babylonia. The Babylonian problem had not been solved during the preceding decades by the opposite, but equally costly, strategies of repression and favour, nor by

[62] For a bird's eye view see recently Radner (2016) and Frahm (2016).

[63] On this problematic point see Fales (2010: 140–145).

Assurbanipal's war against his "twin" brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin, king of Babylon—a war that had absorbed enormous resources, and had unleashed strife within Babylonian towns as the case of Uruk exemplifies.

If we can rely on the scarce written evidence concerning the empire's last years, it may be observed that the Assyrian provincial system was still in function, but that defections and dearth of forces had almost transformed the Assyrian communication system into an adverse factor. Alliances, such as that with the Egyptians, were also functioning, but only to a limited extent, since the Egyptians seem to have profited by empowering of the western provinces of the empire and provided their help mainly to curb Babylonian expansion in that sector.

On one hand Assyria achieved the dimensions of a real empire, in which the centre was the connecting point of the whole apparatus through the involvement of local elites in government and their absorption of the imperial system and ideology, besides the organization of local and general infrastructures. On the other hand, these connecting ties were imperfectly organized, and exposed to the risk of excessive personalization, increasing costs to be maintained, and the creation of alternative leaderships, especially under the stimulus of changing economical and relational circuits that can not be clearly reconstructed on the basis of the extant sources. Already during Assurbanipal's rule, and probably especially during the last and scarcely documented phase of his reign, these dynamics and problems reached a critical point and their combined negative effects were impossible to cope with.

The final destruction and dismantling of the offices and directive centre of the empire—with all its palace, urban and rural buildings—has been largely attributed to the ravaging wrath of the Medes, eager to plunder the enormous richness of the Assyrian cities, but was probably planned by those who were conscious of the potential, actual and symbolic, of the imperial apparatus, that only complete erasure could have prevented from regaining control of its former relations, and of the need of re-creating these symbols in the new centre of imperial power.

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The "End" of the Achaemenid-Persian Empire: Caesura and Transformation in Dialogue

Julian Degen and Robert Rollinger

Abbreviations

GHI	Rhodes and Osborne (2003)
RINBE	The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (2 = Weiershäudser and Novotny 2020)

1 Introduction

The Achaemenid-Persian Empire is generally acknowledged to represent one of the largest empires of the ancient worlds.[1] Since the late sixth c. BCE it directly controlled an area that reached from the rivers Indus, Amudarja and Syrdarja in the East to the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean in the west. As a true empire it had dynamic border zones[2] that went

[1] For general introductions and overviews see Brosius (2021); Jacobs and Rollinger (2021a); Rollinger (2014a, b); Waters (2014); Wiesehöfer (2001); Briant (2002, 2016).

[2] Gehler and Rollinger (2014, 2022).

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far beyond the area directly controlled by the Great Kings rather than fixed borders.[3] In the eyes of the Great Kings and the imperial elites, the empire represented "the world as such" without any extant competitor who could match or challenge the Great Kings' claim to rule their "lands" and "peoples".[4] Deeply rooted in the cultural horizons of ancient Elam,[5] the empire emerged in the middle of the sixth c. BCE in South-Western Iran around the conqueror king Cyrus II (559–530).[6] In a very short period of time he and his son Cambyses II (530–522) subdued the entire ancient Near East including not only the core areas of the former Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires but also the vast "peripheries" of these predecessors' realms, Anatolia, Egypt, western, central and eastern Iran.[7] After a period of crises that followed the death of Cambyses II, Darius I (522/1–486) established a new dynasty that ruled the empire for the next 200 years to come.[8] It is only with the protracted campaign of Alexander III that the Achaemenids and their empire found a sudden "end" which is conspicuously manifested in the death of the last Achaemenid king Darius III (336–330) in 330 BCE.[9]

Although there are plenty of studies concerning the Achaemenid-Persian Empire by modern scholarship a critical evaluation of its end can hardly be found.[10] This has various reasons. On the one hand, the Classical sources already yielded a grand narrative about the empire's decline and fall that was eagerly adapted and taken for granted by modern scholarship until the 1980s.[11] According to this western-centered perspective the empire perished either due to the ethical and moral deficits of its kings and elites or due to structural defects purportedly already inherent in its design from the very beginning.[12] Examining the downfall of the Achaemenid Empire means to challenge the perspectives of Classical as well as modern narratives. The main methodological problem consists in the fact that the modern historian can grasp the empire's late period mostly through texts concerning the life and reign of Alexander III.[13] However, using those sources for

[3] Rollinger (2021a); See also Tuplin (2019).

[4] Rollinger (2014a, b, 2017, 2022); Bichler and Rollinger (2017); Cf. Briant (2021).

[5] Henkelman (2008, 2018).

[6] Shayegan (2018); Waters (2022).

[7] Rollinger (2021b); Ruffing (2021).

[8] Rollinger and Degen (2021a).

[9] On Darius III and his empire see Briant (2009a, 2015).

[10] An exception is Wiesehöfer (1996, 2007a); there is also no chapter on this issue in Brosius (2021). This is also true for Jacobs and Rollinger (2021a, b). The most recent paper dealing with imperial aspects of Achaemenid rule is Waters (2021, 130–132), who dedicates only a few words to the empire's downfall and is rather concerned with the assessment of Alexander the Great's role in this process; Specific aspects have been highlighted by Briant (2018, 2021); Hyland (2018b); Rop (2018).

[11] Gershevitch (1985).

[12] For details see Wiesehöfer (1996, 2007a); Briant (2009b); Cf. also Tuplin (2014a).

[13] Exceptions are Plutarch's biography of Artaxerxes II. See Binder (2008) and the 15th and 16th book of Diodorus. See Stronk (2018); although indigenous sources started to increase in the last years, these sources mainly reveal local administrative perspectives. See below fn. 43.

reconstructing historical processes and events of the late fourth century causes manifold problems. The most challenging task is to overcome the single-minded focus of the sources. These are texts focusing on Alexander as their main protagonist, while neglecting almost all other events of this time.[14] Hence, the perspective of our sources provides only a small insight for the modern reader to look on Alexander's campaign. They share a Greek perspective and subscribe agency to a single man only. This means that the authors of our sources exhibit a biased emphasis on the conqueror and not the conquest when they picked up the pen. As a consequence, there is no ancient voice explaining the reasons for the empire's downfall beyond classical stereotypes, simply because its end was regarded to be the logical consequence of Alexander's invasion. Hence, we find much more information on the young Argead's 'greatness' in these texts than on the Achaemenid Empire as stage of his campaign. The total absence of any structural explanations in the ancient sources highly affected Western scholarly narratives which had been created in the time of the "Enlightenment". The latter are still having a lasting effect on modern contributions to Alexander.[15] Regarding this weather of distortions, a structural analysis which is sensitive enough for imperial structures is needed to answer the question why the Achaemenids' rule finally came to an end.

On the other hand, the changes in perspective on the empire, starting with the *Achaemenid History Workshops* in the last two decades of the last century,[16] very much concentrated on deconstructing this grand narrative but did not really address the still open question why the empire collapsed in the end. Scholars related to this new perspective invested much acumen and ingenuity in highlighting the continuities after the death of the last Achaemenid king.[17] The obvious existence of such continuities was coined in a provocative manner by Pierre Briant in characterizing Alexander III as "the last Achaemenid".[18] As some harsh reactions testify, the provocation was as successful as Briant's "formule provocante" was misunderstood.[19] What he successfully wanted to pinpoint was to question the validity of the general held view that grew fond over centuries and that regarded Alexander's appearance as an absolute break in ancient Near Eastern history and the dawn of a new era.[20] Briant never denied that Alexander's campaign signifies a marking caesura. Alexander did not stage himself as Achaemenid as his choice for Babylon

[14] See, for instance, P.A. Stadter's assessment of Arrian's Anabasis, which is our main source for Alexander's reign, idem 1980, 63: "The Anabasis is not the study of a war, or of a movement of peoples, but of a man." See now for Arrian Rollinger and Degen (in press). For Curtius cf. Wulfram (2016).

[15] Briant (2012); Cf. Bichler (2014, 2018a); Müller (2014).

[16] Jacobs and Rollinger (2021b).

[17] Briant and Joannès (2006).

[18] Briant (2002: 856, 2017a: 29).

[19] For criticism see Fox (2007); Wiemer (2007).

[20] See Briant (2010: 183–185).

as his major residency clearly signaled a break with the Achaemenid past.[21] What is true, however, is that the 'new' view on the topic much more focused on continuity and transformation and less on downfall and collapse. Of course, both perspectives do not really have to exclude one another. Yet this has to be demonstrated rather than to simply be postulated.

In the following we intend to throw a new glimpse on the end of the Achaemenid Empire. This will be done in a somehow general manner without exhaustive treatment of every single aspect. We will proceed in four steps. First, we investigate the structure of the empire in the fourth century BCE especially focusing on possible signs of structural weakness, indications of numbness and loss of its capacity for action. Second, we put those classical sources into perspective that present the picture of a declining and weak empire. Third, we address the reasons for Alexander's success and the dynamics of change and transformation. Fourth and finally, we try to embed the results in an overall and comparative context.

2 Some Observations on the Structure of the Achaemenid Empire in the Fourth c. BCE and the Aegean as an Imperial Border Zone

One of the most important sources for the state of the Achaemenid Empire in its last decades are the writings of Isocrates. Throughout the second half of the fourth c. he created and specified his idea of a Hellenic world united in fighting against the Persian Empire as its archenemy.[22] Although he advanced some arguments in favour of the weak status of the Achaemenid Empire and therefore depicted it as an easy target for Greek aggressions, his ideas never enjoyed much popularity among contemporary politics.[23] If we treat the political speeches in Athens as what they were, highly rhetorical accounts not being representative for the general view of the *demos*, we see that the Great King and his satraps were rather considered as partners in struggles within the Aegean world than representing archenemies of the Greeks.[24] Pro-Persian political factions were considerable factors of the political landscape in all important *poleis* such as Thebes, Sparta and Athens.[25] Even in the time of Philip II and Alexander, pro-Persian *stasis*-parties acted as imperial agents and successfully brought their cities back under the direct influence of the Achaemenid Empire after having caused civil strife. Telling examples are Eresos, Mytilene and Ephesus where

[21] See the detailed treatment of this topic by Degen (forthcoming-a, forthcoming-b). There is also a break in Achaemenid provincial capitals as the archaeological record attests. This is now clearly testified for Gordion: Dusinberre (2019); Cf. also Briant (2020b).

[22] Flower (2000); Weißenberger (2003). Contra: Low (2018); Seibert (1998).

[23] Papillon (2007); Briant (2010); Seibert (1998) contra Bellen (1974) (high influence).

[24] Wiesehöfer (2006); Briant (2002: 579–583, 591–600); Jehne (1994: 161–165); Lewis (1989).

[25] Börm (2019); Gehrke (1985).

Macedonian rule was not welcomed a priori.[26] The people in Asia Minor thus did not view the arrival of the Macedonians as liberation from the Persian yoke.[27] The same applies to mainland Greece. For instance, an inscription from Laconia demonstrates that Persian money was very much appreciated by Sparta, which changed its political attitude towards the Great King during the Peloponnesian War and in early fourth c. BCE in flexible ways.[28] In the fourth century such a stance was common behaviour, as we see in Aeschines' remark that the Great King wanted the Athenians to stop asking for gold in order to support their preparations for war against Alexander shortly after he had crossed the Hellespont.[29] When Philip II established a *koine eirene*, also known as the Corinthian League, the acceptance of Persian subsidies was expressly prohibited by the Macedonian hegemon.[30] Nevertheless, in Darius III the enemies of Argead hegemony found a great supporter of their resistance against Alexander during his conquest of Asia. The Spartan king Agis III's war against Alexander's representative Antipatros was also supported both by Persian gold and troops.[31] Indeed, the Great King gained considerable influence in the Aegean worlds by providing gold throughout the fourth century. This may have been the reason for the Greek nickname of Artaxerxes I (464–424) who was perceived as *makrocheir* 'the long-armed'.[32] In any case, the Achaemenids' involvement in the Greeks' struggles for hegemony amongst themselves was partly perceived as 'liberation'. We see this in the case of Thebes' resistance against Alexander, when the pro-Persian faction of citizens invited the Greek world to take part in their struggle for 'liberation' of the Macedonian yoke.[33] Thus, the well-known slogans of Philip and Alexander to liberate the Greeks of Asia Minor from the Great King were nothing more than a claim that they would become subjects of the Macedonian Empire.[34] Whereas in the end the name of the ruler changed, the administrative realities remained mostly untouched by Alexander.[35]

Not only the purported enmity between Hellas and the Achaemenid Empire, but also the idea of a united Greek world is much more fiction related to Isocrates' writings than

[26] Wallace (2016); Ellis-Evans (2012).

[27] Degen (2022); Briant (2010); Seibert (1998); See the splendid analysis of the Greek discourse on freedom by Raaflaub (1985).

[28] On SEG XXXIX: 370 see Ruffing (2018: 158–160); On Achaemenid involvement in the Peloponnesian War and in the fourth c. BCE, see Tuplin (1993); Wiesehöfer (2006).

[29] Aesch. 3.238.

[30] Ad IG IV 556 see Rop (2017).

[31] Diod. 17.48.1.

[32] Cf. Harrison (2011).

[33] Arr. An. 1.7.2. On Thebes and Alexander see Worthington (2010).

[34] On the vexed question, whether the Greeks of Asia Minor became either subjects of the Macedonian Empire or members of the Corinthean League, see Degen (2022); Jehne (1994); Stylianou (1994).

[35] See Faraguna (2020).

historical fact built on firm ground.[36] The fourth century saw a couple of conflicts between Athens, Sparta and Thebes in which the Great King became involved in different ways. However, there was no attempt of a common Greek enterprise against the Achaemenid Empire. A panhellenic campaign remained a hypothetical construct for about two thirds of the century. Only after the rise of Macedonia under Philip II the antagonism between the Greek poleis and the Great King became an issue.[37] Nevertheless, even in this case 'Panhellenism' was nothing more than an artificial ideology driven by Philip's claim to lead the Greeks as their *hegemon* in a common war, as Athens had already done in the fourth century against Sparta, Thebes and Macedonia as her enemies.[38] The influence of Isocrates' writings on the Argeads is a matter of debate. In any case, the war objectives of the campaigns of Philip and Alexander were rather different from Isocrates' vision of a Panhellenic War.

Nevertheless, Isocrates' ideas are still influencing heavily our modern image of the late Achaemenid Empire's political power and stability. To make matters even worse in addition, the modern historian has to face a nearly absolute silence of epichoric Achaemenid sources. With Artaxerxes I (464–424) and the definite establishment of empire in the third generation of its existence,[39] Achaemenid dynastic legitimation abandoned historical narrative, and the royal inscriptions became timeless and rather formalistic from then onwards.[40] Therefore, sources from the empire accounting the deeds of the Great Kings do not exist anymore. Although we gain some historical information on imperial events from the Babylonian 'Astronomical Diaries' from Babylon,[41] which are absent from Greek accounts, the indigenous sources, nevertheless, do not provide any earth-shaking new insights.[42] The huge amount of remaining texts is of administrative nature.[43] However, a careful reading of these sources reveals a set of micro-perspectives which nonetheless allow some important conclusions on the stability of the empire. Such a close look on imperial Achaemenid power politics clearly demonstrates that there is no indication for a decline of the empire and the Great Kings' power.

The influence of the Achaemenid Empire on the Aegean worlds can be grasped by the canonical sources only in a narrow sense. Deep insights can be gained by the writings of

[36] On Panhellenism as Athenian slogan to fight against her political enemies, see Low (2018).

[37] Diod. 16.89.2.

[38] Low (2018).

[39] Wiesehöfer (2007b).

[40] Rollinger (2014a, 2016a).

[41] Haubold et al. (2019).

[42] Cf. Briant (2015: 15–64). See also Van der Spek (2003) and the collection of sources in Briant (2009a).

[43] Cf. Becking (2020); Briant (2016: 395–397, 2020a: 176–180); Folmer (2017); Hackl and Oelsner (2018); Henkelman and Folmer (2016); Jacobs et al. (2017); Lemaire (2015); Naveh and Shaked (2012); Porten and Yardeni (2014); Porten and Yardeni (2016, 2018, 2020); Quack (2016); Tuplin and Ma (2021); van der Spek (1998); Cf. also Rossi (2021); Stolper (2021); Jursa (2021); Gzella (2021a); Elayi (2021); Kratz (2021); Hajnal (2021).

Speusippos, who followed Plato as head of the Academy in Athens. With his letters addressed to Philip, he tried to push back the influence of Isocrates at the Macedonian court. In one of these letters he deals with the lack of papyrus in Athens due to Artaxerxes' III reconquest of Egypt.[44] This is a telling example of the Achaemenid Empire's control of relevant resources and thus of the entangled economies of the Eastern Mediterranean. Apparently, the Great King influenced the Aegean worlds to a higher degree as we learn from the canonical sources.[45]

Egypt can be used as a good case study to assert the unbroken power of the last of the Achaemenid Great Kings.[46] Artaxerxes III (359–338) and Darius III (336–330) were both able to reconquer the former satrapy after local revolts had broken out.[47] However, whereas the historical information for the revolt under Artaxerxes III rests on rather firm historical ground,[48] the sources for the revolt under the last Achaemenid are shaky.[49] From Demotic sources we learn that not long before Alexander's advance to Egypt a local rebellion unleashed that once more caused the end of Persian rule.[50] Nevertheless, our sources on Alexander confirm that a certain Mazdakes was satrap in the time of the Macedonian conquest. This implies a reconquest of Egypt at the beginning of Darius' III reign. It might have been this very campaign why the powerful Persian fleet was engaged otherwise when the Macedonians crossed the Hellespont in 334 without any resistance.[51] Although Darius' III campaign against Egypt remains somehow obscure, a military still active and forceful Persian Empire in the fourth c. BCE perfectly fits into a larger picture. There is evidence that in 340 BCE Persian satraps launched an attack at Perinthos to stop the expansionistic aspirations of Philip II.[52] This campaign perhaps ended the former treaty on *philia kai symmachia* between the Argead ruler and the Great King. For how long this treaty existed is subject of ongoing debates, but its mentioning in our sources can be taken as a telling argument for the Great King as a still mighty player in the Aegean power-system.[53] Arrian leaves no doubt that in the late fourth c. BCE the mighty Persian fleet was still credited as holding a *thallasokratia* in the Eastern Mediterranean and thus had to be taken as a serious

[44] Speusippos 14: Natoli (2004).

[45] Cf. also Ruffing (2018: 158–160).

[46] Rollinger and Degen (2021a); Vittmann (2021).

[47] For the revolt under Artaxerxes III see Brosius (2021: 199f).

[48] Brosius (2021: 199–200).

[49] Cf. Wojciechowska (2016).

[50] See Briant (2015: 49–54).

[51] Briant (2015: 52); Anson (1989).

[52] Arr. An. 2.14.2; Diod. 16.74. Buckler and Beck (2008: 233–253); cf. Bloedow (2003).

[53] Müller (2016: 264); Moreover, see Aeschin. 3.238 as further evidence for the treaty. This corresponds with a short remark by Justin-Trogus (Iust. 7.4.2.) about vivid Achaemenid influence on Macedonia after the so-called Persian Wars. It testifies that Macedonian expansion under Alexander I (498, 497–454) was only possible due to the benevolence of the Achaemenid Empire.

opponent by all Aegean players, both small and large.[54] Indeed, it demonstrated decisive resistance against Alexander's invasion along the coast of Asia Minor in the years 334–332. The Great King even managed to re-establish domination over Cyprus which came into the focus of Achaemenid imperial aspirations throughout the fourth c. BCE.[55] Seen in a *longue durée*, regaining domination over Egypt and Cyprus highlights how successful the Achaemenid Empire was.[56] Furthermore, even in the time after Darius' defeat at Issus, the city-states of the Levant fought back hard against the Macedonian invaders. The sieges of Tyre and Gaza were time-consuming enterprises for the Macedonians, which gave Darius' imperial agents time to organise further resistance. Some coins found in Egypt bear the Aramaic legend *MZDK*. This implies that the satrap Mazdakes was in charge to issue coins for levying an army against Alexander.[57] These glimpses on the events achieved from the scanty indigenous evidence clearly demonstrate that even after his great victory at Issus, Alexander had to face hard resistance from a still functioning empire and its agents.

Isocrates was well aware that the Great King was able to successfully meet any aggression, but, in his eyes, the military power of the empire rested on the Greek mercenary troops serving the Great King only.[58] However, although the Greek sources uniformly give high numbers of Aegean mercenaries their importance for the Achaemenid army is exaggerated.[59] This fact was demonstrated convincingly by recent studies which exhibit that the Great Kings' engagement of Greek mercenaries was much more politically motivated than experts had previously thought.[60] Since the Great Kings regarded these persons as subjects in general, these groups need to be seen as an instrument of the Achaemenid power-play towards the Aegean world. Greek mercenaries were of high significance to maintain imperial power in the Western border-zones. Both the satraps and selected imperial agents were granted the privilege of levying troops by themselves for which the Great King sent financial support.[61] We know that already Artaxerxes III granted much land to Memnon of Rhodes in Asia Minor for his merits as a leader of mercenaries.[62]

[54] Arr. An. 7.9.6.

[55] Wiesehöfer (1990, 2000); Mehl (2021); Cf. also Wiesehöfer (2011); Geus and Lund (2019); Multhoff (2019); Rollinger (in press).

[56] See also Tuplin (2014b: 669).

[57] Briant (2015: 58).

[58] Degen (2022).

[59] Bichler (2020); Rop (2019); Cf. also Hofstetter (1978); Tuplin (2017a, 2021).

[60] Rop (2019: 19–28).

[61] Isocrat. 4.142; Hell. Oxyr. 21.2 = col. 16 in Behrwald (2005); Arist. Oec. 2.1351b; See the discussion in Degen (2022).

[62] Ellis-Evans (2018) (numismatic evidence); Kholod (2018a) (Achaemenid *dorea* to Memnon); Heckel (1994) (reservations). Even the children of Memnon and Mentor were regarded as 'Persians'; See Wiesehöfer (2015). On the social dimension of the labels 'Persian', 'Greek' and 'Macedonian' see below fn. 151.

The ability to raise an army of mercenaries of remarkable size became a crucial feature of Achaemenid power politics in the Aegean. In 393 the satrap Pharnabazus launched a raid into the Peloponnese and in the same year towards Perinthos.[63] Already Philip II was well aware of these capacities when he established the *koine eirene* in 337. He even conceptualized a clause on loyalty for the members of the Corinthian League stipulating that military engagement for the Great King was not tolerated.[64] Obviously, the Great King and his imperial agents were considered powerful players in the Aegean worlds shortly before the Achaemenid Empire came to its end.

Isocrates enhanced his arguments for the weakness of the empire with an analysis of its foreign politics. In his eyes, the political weakness of the empire was based on its lack of military offensive power. Although the Achaemenid Empire showed no ambition to conquer territories in the Aegean after the famous campaigns of Darius I and Xerxes I, the Great Kings, nevertheless, exerted influence by guaranteeing peace in Hellas.[65] This resulted in bringing the cities of western Asia Minor back under indirect Achaemenid control. Indeed, we know little about the so-called 'Peace of Kallias' in the fifth c. BCE, but one century later the Achaemenid Empire was still the dominant power in the Aegean.[66] Nearly 20 years after the campaign of Agesilaus in Asia Minor had failed, the Greek world negotiated peace by establishing a Common Peace (*koine eirene*) which was guaranteed by the Great King.[67] This so-called 'Peace of Antalcidas' in 387/6 guaranteed peace not only in the Hellenic World, but also in the Western parts of the Achaemenid Empire. As a result, it was the Great King who bestowed *autonomia* among the Greek *poleis* on the coast of Asia Minor.[68] He did so because Athens and Sparta wanted the Greek city states under Achaemenid rule to be free from political influence of any Greek party, Athenian and Spartan. From the turn of the fifth to the fourth century onwards, the *poleis* of Asia Minor became an ongoing agenda in the antagonizing power politics between Athens and Sparta.[69] How important the Athenians considered the 'Peace of Antalcidas' can be seen in the run-up to their ambitious claims of power after their loss of empire in the Peloponnesian War. When Athens established a *symmachia* with Chios in 384, it was important to exemplify that this did not imply a violation of the terms of the 'Peace of Antalcidas'.[70] The same applies to the invitation to join the Second Athenian League which can be grasped in the so-called 'Aristotle-Decree' from Athens.[71] The raison d'être of this

[63] Xen. Hell. 4.8.7; Diod. 14.84–86.

[64] Degen (2022).

[65] Hyland (2018a).

[66] See the still fundamental debate between Meiggs (1984) and Meister (1982).

[67] Xen. Hell. 5.1.31. Buckler and Beck (2008: 71–78); Jehne (1994); Ryder (1965).

[68] On *autonomia* see Bosworth (1992).

[69] Jehne (1991); Seager and Tuplin (1980).

[70] GHI 20, esp. ll. 13′–17′; Cf. the commentary by Rhodes and Osborne (2003: 86).

[71] GHI 22, ll. 7′–14′.

symmachia was to guarantee the *autonomia* of the Greek world against the imperialistic endeavours of Sparta.[72] As we see, *autonomia* was rather an instrument to safeguard 'neutrality' within the Greek struggles for hegemony than a specific tool to guarantee the freedom from Persian menace. From the Peace of Antalcidas through the Macedonian campaign led by Parmenio and Attalus, Achaemenid rule over Asia Minor remained stable.[73]

In the far west, however, things took another direction when Philip II ascended the throne and Macedonia developed into a supra-regional big player. For the second time in Achaemenid history, after the Delian League of the fifth c. BCE, an empire emerged on the fringes of the Great King's realm, when the Greek city states became part of the Macedonian Empire in 338/7.[74] From this time onwards, the Greeks saw themselves in between two competing hegemonical powers. Philip's foreign policy towards the East was offensive and partly successful, since some poleis on the islands close to Asia Minor became members of the *koine eirene*.[75] For a short time, this even affected the decision making of the Persian satrap Pixodarus. When he was informed that the Great King Arses (338–336) became a victim of a court intrigue, he tried to arrange a marriage with the Argeads. As soon as Darius III has ascended the throne, Pixodarus quit any further attempts to come to terms with Philip II.[76] As a Great King with a firm base of power, Darius III was even able to regain immediately authority in the westernmost satrapies after the 2 years of turbulence following the death of Artaxerxes' III in 338. These somehow chaotic years during the reign of Arses (338–336) may explain why the Macedonian campaign of Parmenio and Attalus towards in Asia Minor 337 was a great success from a strategical point of view. At least some of the poleis in western Asia Minor were ready to accept Macedonian hegemony.[77] The long arm of the Macedonian king might even have reached Samos where the *demos* dedicated an honorary inscription to him.[78] Philip may have regarded this expedition as test case for the reaction of the local poleis concerning his campaign to come. In any case, 4 years later Alexander secured the extant administration landscape entrenched by his father and established pro-Macedonian factions in all *poleis* under his control.[79]

[72] GHI 22, ll. 9′–11′.

[73] Kholod (2018b).

[74] For the classification of the Macedonian state under Philip as an empire, see Zahrnt (2014); For the classification of the Delian League as empire, see Kehne (2014); On the fact that Athens never used the Second Athenian League as tool for exercising imperial power, cf. Cargill (1981).

[75] See the various arguments of Wallace (2016); Ellis-Evans (2012) and Stylianou (1994).

[76] Plut. Alex. 10.1–3. Cf. Berve (1926: 640).

[77] Kholod (2018b).

[78] IG XII6 1:61.

[79] Kholod (2017); Nawotka (2003a); Wirth (1972).

3 Greek Perspectives and Larger Contexts

The reader of the standard works on Greek history of the fourth c. BCE is acquainted with the common idea that the late Achaemenid Empire found itself in a weak state since the reign of Xerxes I or even Cambyses II.[80] The reign of the second Achaemenid Great King, Xerxes I, is generally regarded as a watershed by the majority of Greek writers. While the empire under his father, Darius I, is generally perceived to be vital and mighty, the defeats of his successor against an alliance of Greek poleis marked the beginning of the empire's slow but steady downfall. This view is largely built on the writings of Xenophon and the Athenian intellectuals Plato and Isocrates.[81] In their works, these writers did not only focus on the power of the Achaemenid Empire but also on the alleged Great Kings' decadence by judging the moral behaviours of the later rulers. In the eyes of Xenophon and Plato, the founder of the empire, Cyrus II, was the ideal ruler but his successors turned the empire into a realm of tyranny. Both of their arguments, however, are based on the idea that the young Persians' education became decadent and thus rulership lost moderation.[82] It is an easy task to argue against these stereotyped images of the Great Kings, since there are plenty of sources providing ample evidence that the Achaemenids still respected local traditions and granted *Lokalautonomie*, i.e. forms of government on the lowest level of administration.[83] Although these Greek authors prove rather good knowledge on specific Achaemenid issues such as court society and royal ideology,[84] their works, nonetheless, were designed for a Greek intellectual audience thus creating and following a specific discursive atmosphere.[85] The latter was fond of focussing on the relationship between education, constitution and rulership.[86] Hence, information on the Achaemenid Empire subtracted from the works of Xenophon and Plato is less intended to be a reliable statement on Achaemenid matters than a product of Greek intellectuals using the empire as background for discussing relevant topics of their time.[87]

These observations take us back to Darius III. As we have seen, his position as Great King was thoroughly firm since the time of powerful courtiers came to an end. The Greek sources mention plenty of intrigues at the Persian court, which were about to erode the power of the Great King although this had never caused any change of dynasty.[88] The

[80] Bichler and Rollinger (2021); Morgan (2017); Cf. Wiesehöfer (1996, 2007a); Zahrnt (1983: 252–257).

[81] Tuplin (2018a).

[82] Wiesehöfer (1996); Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1987); Briant (1982).

[83] Wiesehöfer (1995).

[84] Llewellyn-Jones (2013); Jacobs and Rollinger (2010); Jacobs (2020).

[85] Degen (2020, 2022); Tuplin (2013).

[86] Cf. Jacobs (2020); Flower (2012); Papillon (2007).

[87] Brosius (2021: 190–197).

[88] Degen (2021a). Being a member of the Achaemenid dynasty was an essential precondition to become Great King, see Rollinger (2017).

classical authors provide colourful accounts on these intrigues. They may be exaggerated but the cuneiform sources support this view to a certain degree. We know that some courtiers accumulated different offices and their power at court increased.[89] The episodes on Bagoas by the pen of Diodorus bear important information. He seems to have been a satrap (*to basilei diokekos*) of the 'Upper Satrapies' and an *eunuchos* at the royal court, where he acted as king-maker in the case of the last two Achaemenids.[90] By killing him, Darius III re-established authority over the whole empire. Bagoas represents a well-documented example for a new relationship between the Great King and the imperial elites, but he is not an isolated case. We know that Aristanzanes was not only *eisangeleus* at the court (which seems to have been a minor office at the court of Darius I, at least according to Herodotus), but also commander of an army during Artaxerxes' III campaign in Egypt.[91] In the light of these sources, it is possible to argue, at least temporarily, for a shift of power in the relationship between the Great King and the imperial elites in the course of the fourth c. BCE. Nevertheless, the ability of Darius III to regain authority towards the powerful imperial elites is a good argument for characterizing the late Achaemenid Empire as a still strong political entity.

However, this does not mean that the Achaemenid Empire did not face serious challenges. The real threats for the Achaemenid Great Kings originated from the empire's own agents. The attempt of usurping the throne by the Achaemenid prince Cyrus the Younger in 401/0 implied a critical situation for the empire. This is also true for the so-called 'Great Satraps Revolts' in the years 362/1 which was instigated by the satraps of Asia Minor.[92] Furthermore, a revolt in Bactria broke out when Artaxerxes I acceded to the throne.[93] All these revolts were launched by satraps whereas in Babylonia, the Levant and in Egypt local elites revolted against Achaemenid rule.[94] Nevertheless, the empire remained stable throughout the fourth century, although disloyal satraps were the main cause for strife. Even in these times of inner conflicts, the Achaemenid Great King proved his unbroken power and ability to pacify and maintain the empire.

[89] Cf. Degen (2021b); For the case of courtiers called *ustarbaru* in Babylonian sources, see Tavernier (2014).

[90] Diod. 16.50.8. On the difficulties to correctly understand the Greek term *eunuchos*, see Madreiter (2012: 52–70).

[91] Diod. 16.47.3. For the office of *eisangeleus*, see Degen (2017, 2021b).

[92] Briant (2002: 612–690); Brosius (2021: 187).

[93] Briant (2002: 570, 2020a). Already Weiskopf (1989) demonstrated that these revolts were rather uncoordinated and driven by competing ambitions of the main protagonists.

[94] Colburn (2020a); Wiesehöfer (2016); Waerzeggers and Seire (2018); Wijnsma (2018); Wasmuth (2017); Ruzicka (2012: 77–217); Henkelman et al. (2010).

4 The Role of Alexander III

As we have already seen, good arguments can be crafted from our sources confirming that the Achaemenid Empire was neither in a state of weakness nor decline when Alexander ascended the throne. Thus, it appears that the vast ancient Near Eastern empire was less 'waiting' to be conquered by Alexander 'the Great' than representing a political entity wielding influence deep into Macedonian spheres of interest. From this backdrop, we have every right to doubt that the Macedonians intended to conquer the whole Achaemenid Empire when they crossed the Hellespont in 334.[95] The problem with our sources on the Macedonian conquest is that they are more or less all based on the work of Callisthenes.[96] This pamphlet served Alexander's intention of creating an 'official' version of his deeds and thus aimed to create public opinion in Macedonia and the Corinthian League that sheds favourable light on the conqueror.[97] This takes us to the crucial question of the objectives of the Macedonian campaign, how they changed and were adopted, and how the imperial aspirations of Alexander developed over time as a process in dialogue with his ongoing success.

Our sources on Alexander are narratives with a perspective *post eventum*. Thus, they bear considerable problems of interpretation. Therefore, any analysis has to be sensitive enough to highlight changes during the ongoing campaign. Only by this way, an examination of the young conqueror's imperial ambitions will become feasible. Such an attempt has to start with the vexed question of the overall objectives pursued by Alexander. Different answers to this question are possible.

Our sources are in disagreement concerning the objectives of Alexander's campaign.[98] On the one hand, already Aristoboulos and later Diodorus, Plutarch and Arrian make their readers believe that the conquest of 'Asia' was the goal of Alexander's campaign from its very beginning.[99] On the other hand, a close reading of the narratives shows that this aim played no role for Alexander until the death of Darius III in 330.[100] In this weather of confusion, it is crucial to keep in mind that, in our sources, 'Asia' is less a geographical term than a label to identify the Persian Empire.[101] As we have already seen above, the Achaemenid Empire was in no way in a precarious state when Alexander started his

[95] Degen (2019b).

[96] Zahrnt (2006, 2016); Devine (1994); See further Rzepka (2016).

[97] Degen (2022); SEG 56: 1106 in Battistoni (2006: 170–172). On patterns in Alexander's 'official language', see Degen (forthcoming-a, forthcoming-b).

[98] Cf. Austin (2003) who highlights these sources to have been designed by *post festum* perspectives.

[99] Diod. 17.17.2 (see Degen 2019b). Aristoboulos BNJ 139 F 7a (=Arr. An. 2.3); F 7b (=Plut. Alex. 18.2–4). This was even projected back to Philip as Diod. 16.91.4 demonstrates where the conquest of 'Asia' is announced by the Pythia to the Macedonian king. Cf. generally the critical remarks by Degen (2019b); Hatzopoulos (2020: 161–169).

[100] Curt. 6.2.18; 3.10–12; Arr. An. 4.15.6; 5.26.7; Arr. Ind. 35.8.

[101] Briant (2021); Nawotka (2012).

invasion. It was by no means an easy victim for the Macedonian aggression. From this backdrop the idea of a successful conquest of the whole empire seems less a realistic objective than wishful thinking. In this regard the alleged motivation of Alexander's campaign as 'war for reprisal' for what Xerxes committed to the Greeks was less a realistic objective than a slogan limited for a Greek audience and especially the Greek contingents in the Macedonian imperial army.[102] Such a strategy might have been even more appropriate after the harsh punishment of Thebes and the disaster such a destructive fury must have implied for the pro-Macedonian propaganda in Hellas. A limited operation in Asia Minor and the Levant to win the hearts of the Greek poleis and distributed accordingly by a Greek historiographer like Callisthenes appears to have been a perfect means to cure Macedonia's tarnished reputation.[103]

An indication for the early plans of Alexander and the strategies involved may be deduced from a comparison with the campaign of Cyrus the Younger against his brother Artaxerxes II in 401. As has been demonstrated convincingly by P. Głogowski, Cyrus could count on the assistance of the local Persian elites, as long as his ambitions were confined to Asia Minor. For this reason, he kept his final goal to challenge his brother as Great King secret for quite a time.[104] Only after he had moved into Syria and was about to cross the Euphrates he, for the first time, openly addressed his intention to wage war against his brother.[105] This important observation gains momentum when compared with the process of Alexander's military operations. On the one hand, it reveals why Artaxerxes met Cyrus the Younger only at Cunaxa. It was so because for a certain time the Great King was either unaware or deceived by his brother's real intentions. Only late he became aware of Cyrus' plans when his younger brother crossed the Euphrates. This was different with Darius III and Alexander. Obviously, Darius was very well informed about Alexander's intention to move beyond the Gates of Taurus into Syria. For this reason, he sought to meet and destroy the Macedonian army before Alexander invaded Syria. Therefore, he had to take preparations in advance and indeed he was able to challenge Alexander and his army already at Issus. This means that the Great King was aware of Alexander's plans which cannot have been kept entirely secret. Such a knowledge allows to hypothesize that Alexander and his generals followed the already well-known goals coveted by Philip. These plans may have been related to the awareness that a firm and sustained grip on the cities of Asia Minor was only possible by definitely turning down the powerful Persian fleet. Destroying the Great King's naval supremacy seems to have been the Macedonians' ultimate object of war from the beginning of the campaign. Alexander knew that the

[102] Degen (2022); Briant (2010); Seibert (1998); See also Wiesehöfer (1994: 27–35).

[103] Regarding the reasons of Alexander for burning down the palace of Persepolis, revenge is only one of many possible explanations for an act of multi-layered meaning. Therefore, one may agree with Bloedow (1995), who called this the most enigmatic episode in Alexander-historiography.

[104] This is at least how Xenophon interpreted Cyrus' only late announcement of this goal. It is of course also possible that Cyrus developed his aims in the course of time.

[105] Głogowski (2020).

Persian fleet could endanger all the fruits of conquests he had won, as witnessed by the struggles the fleet caused in the Aegean until 332 BCE.[106] This intention necessitated a move as far as Syria and Egypt to get hold of the naval bases of the Persian fleet, an intention which might have been obvious for the Great King. Finally, this plan did not imply the crossing of the Euphrates. This was a further step of Alexander's campaign which probably went far beyond his father's (and his general's) ambitions.

Moreover, there are also indications in our sources that the objectives of the Macedonian campaign changed in 331. Disagreement between Alexander and his general Parmenio before entering Mesopotamia constitute a forceful argument that new objectives were set. All our extant sources agree that Parmenio, probably in accordance with Philip's original plans, wanted the campaign to end at the western banks of the Euphrates. Already H. Berve argued that Parmenio's criticism of Alexander's plans to continue the campaign can be seen as a hint that the western banks of the Euphrates were the original objective of the Macedonian invasion.[107] As a small remark by Diodorus reveals, a colourful account must have existed that precisely focussed on the dynamics of the changing objectives at this very time. We learn from this account that Alexander even presented a forgery of a peace proposal by Darius III to his generals, just to provide arguments to continue the campaign.[108] It is these different views in the Macedonian headquarters that nourish the doubts that the Macedonian invasion focussed on the whole Persian Empire already from its very beginning. The objectives of Alexander, who started more intensively to stage himself as alternative to the Achaemenids,[109] appear to have differed from his generals' plans. In any case, all our sources are in accordance about the insatiable lust of conquest by Alexander as early as 331. The desire of the young monarch to subject all of 'Asia' is presented as the driving force of the war, as we see in the cases of Darius' peace proposals in 333 and 331, Alexander's speech after the death of Darius III and during the so-called mutiny at the river Hyphasis in India.[110] This behaviour finally became the most prominent trait of Alexander in writings with a philosophical horizon such as Seneca, Plutarch and Arrian.[111] Endless drive for conquest surely can be seen a key feature of all the extant ancient portrayals of Alexander.[112] However, this personal trait should not be confused with an

[106] Degen (2022); Briant (2010: 42–54); Worthington (2004: 67–71); Wirth (1989).

[107] Berve (1926, no. 606, esp. 302); Bosworth (1988: 97).

[108] Diod. 17.39.1–2.

[109] Wiesehöfer (1994: 26–35).

[110] Degen (2022); See Howe and Müller (2012) for arguments to view the mutiny at the Hyphasis as a product of Roman historiography.

[111] Sen. Ben. 7.2.1, Degen (forthcoming-c, forthcoming-d).; Bichler (2018b); ad Arrian see Burliga (2013).

[112] In the past answering this question divided scholarship on Alexander in different camps. Kraft (1971) (all actions of Alexander were 'rational', i.e. the reasons for Alexander's doings can be explained by the modern historian) contra Badian (1975); Bosworth (1973); Schachermeyer (1973); Fundamental criticism can be grasped by Briant (2010: 25–28) calling for a historiographical approach to these problems.

overall strategy from the very beginning of the campaign. Moreover, it very much looks like a *post festum* construction of our available sources. The situation considerably changed after the victorious battle of Issus when Alexander and his generals moved their troops into Syria. It is also plausible to argue that the astonishingly successful campaign boosted Alexander's position towards the experienced generals of his father.[113] Definitely, from now onwards there was an appetite for empire that increased with the conquest of Egypt and the battle of Gaugamela 1 year later.

The events surrounding the death of Darius III in July 330 accelerated the dynamics and brought some clarity to this case. Since Alexander was not able to get hold of the Great King in person during the battle of Gaugamela in October 331, he was forced to pursue him, in order to avoid the formation of a new Persian army challenging his position in Asia.[114] After taking a break and seizing the Persian heartland in the winter of 331/0, marked by the—intentional or unintentional—spectacular burning of Persepolis, Alexander focused on Darius III again. He exhausted his troops to their limits by hurrying after Darius through Hyrcania only to find him killed by the satrap Bessus.[115] The latter was on his way to the 'Upper Satrapies' in order to become the new Great King Artaxerxes V and to levy a new army. This was a crucial situation that demanded the formulation of new war objectives. If not earlier, it was this situation that finally and definitely gave birth to the idea of the conquest of all 'Asia', i.e. the Achaemenid Empire. We only gain a few insights in this crucial stage of the campaign through a highly rhetorical speech in Curtius' account. Although all the other sources mention the soldiers' plea for returning home, only Curtius presents a lengthy speech of Alexander motivating his troops. The value of speeches in Graeco-Roman historiography as source for historical reconstruction may be a matter of debate, but this piece, even if entirely designed by Curtius himself, bears an accurate assessment of the situation with which the Macedonians were confronted. In this episode, the young conqueror reveals his troops that consolidating power over the already subjected lands requires military conquest of the entire Achaemenid Empire.[116] For the first time we receive direct information about Alexander's imperial aspirations which may already have developed for quite a time.[117] Furthermore, from this point onward, the conquest of the whole Achaemenid Empire becomes the prominent theme of the Alexander-narrative. Regardless of how relevant one estimates the extent of Curtius' creative hands in this speech, it, nevertheless, heralds a shift in the policy of conquest, which so far was more or less focused on defeating the Great King in battle. Two strategies of conquest became

[113] For the Greeks' astonishment of Alexander's success, see Aeschin. 3.164.

[114] Berve (1926, no. 212); Heckel (2006: 71–72); Cf. Klinkott (2020).

[115] On the burning of Persepolis Degen (2022) (includes an overview on literature); Nawotka (2003b); Bloedow (1995); Bosworth (1988: 96); See also Shayegan (2005: 171–175).

[116] Curt. 6.3.1–18. Cf. Bosworth (1988: 97): "Alexander was talking not of revenge but of empire."

[117] See the debates between Parmenio and Alexander as discussed by Berve (1926, no. 606); Cf. Diod. 17.39.1–2.

dominant in Alexander's policy from now onwards. This reveals that new perspectives on empire became a real option.

First, from this time onward, Alexander's policy of seeking cooperation with local elites developed into new dimensions. The origins of this policy can be traced back as early as the crossing of the Hellespont, when Alexander accepted the Persian Mithrenes in his entourage. The latter was commander of the garrison in Sardis and surrendered to the Macedonian troops. For this reason he was able to continue his career at Alexander's court when he became the commander in chief for the campaign to subdue Armenia in 324/3.[118] Integrating local elites in his plans became important for Alexander already a long time before his alleged "Orientalization".[119] The satrap of Babylonia Mazaeus might be considered as the most prominent example of Alexander's so-called 'Pro-Persian Policy'. After the seizure of Babylonia, the Macedonians left the satrap in his office.[120] Furthermore, the career of Darius' III brother, Oxyathres, as *doryphoros* at Alexander's court shows that the new king was well aware of the importance of local elites.[121] Although the *doryphoroi* were high ranked officials in both the Achaemenid Empire and the Argead Empire, they were still subordinated to other offices in the world of Alexander, such as the *somatophylakes* who represented the highest echelons of the entourage.[122] Thus, although Alexander opened the satrapal office for the elites of the former empire, Iranians had no access to the highest ranks of Alexander's World Empire. The situation changed again after Alexander's return from India. While Iranians became more and more important during the ongoing campaign towards the east, they were largely replaced by Macedonians during the consolidation of empire.[123] Therefore, the famous "Susa Weddings" were rather designed as an event of negotiating the new roles of the Iranian nobility in Alexander's empire, than an act of an alleged 'Policy of Fusion'.[124] Nevertheless, Iranian elites did not lose their high status in the course of the Macedonian conquest, as epigraphical sources from Asia Minor clearly show.[125] In general terms, Iranians profited from Alexander's strategies in empire-building, as can be seen in the fact that they lost their powerful positions only after his death.[126] The World Empire of Alexander may deserve the attribute 'Macedonian', but it

[118] Briant (2017b); Berve (1926, no. 524).

[119] Briant (2017b: 517): "But Alexander had to face the issue of co-opting the elites from the moment he landed in Asia Minor."; Cf. Rollinger (2009); On this issue see further Olbrycht (2015a, 2017).

[120] Heckel (2006: 156–157); Berve (1926, no. 484).

[121] Shayegan (2007, no. 82); Berve (1926, no. 586).

[122] For evidence see Degen (2019a, b: 73, 2021b); Collins (2008: 180); Spawforth (2007) and Henkelman (2007); On *somatophylakia* see Heckel (1986).

[123] For an overview see Heckel (2007: 164–165).

[124] Olbrycht (2015b); Bosworth (1980).

[125] Briant (2017b); Mitchell (2007).

[126] Hyland (2013).

was surely characterized by a dialogue between imperial elites with different cultural backgrounds aiming at establishing acceptance of the new ruler.

Second, Alexander knew that the integration of the Iranian nobility demanded the creation of an atmosphere where the Iranian elites were still able to stage their high rank and status. Both rank and status were communicated at the Achaemenid court with proximity and access to the Great King as displayed by prestigious objects and position at the royal table during feasts.[127] On this ground, Alexander adapted elements of the Achaemenid court, which modern commentators are used to characterize as the 'Persianisation' or even "Orientalization" of the Macedonian ruler.[128] A close examination of the contexts and the use of Achaemenid court protocol—such as *proskynesis*—reveals that these 'innovations' did not alter the relation between the Argead ruler and his Macedonian subjects.[129] The same applies for Alexander's new royal costume. When he granted reception to Iranians he wore a different robe than when he spoke to Macedonians.[130] His sense for aligned forms of staging rulership in different cultural contexts made Alexander a true master of representation.[131] All these measures neither caused a change in Alexander's understanding of rulership nor in his conception of power. This is the backdrop of Alexander's ground-breaking proclamation after the battle of Gaugamela, when he called himself *basileus tes Asias* in front of his troops.[132] Regardless the fact that many modern commentators interpret this episode as evidence for Alexander creating a new form of kingship, the proclamation rather was a powerful statement addressed to the imperial elites. Since we know from Plutarch's *Life of Demetrius* that Alexander never bore the title 'Great King', it seems plausible to assume that he staged himself as an alternative to the Achaemenid rule by claiming himself *basileus tes Asias*, i.e. 'king of Asia' or 'king of the Achaemenid Empire'.[133] As it appears, this title is much more an Aegean perception of the royal Persian title, than an accurate rendering of the royal Achaemenid title. Another good argument in support for this kind of arrangements can be made by the inclusion of Mazaeus into the ranks of satraps right after this proclamation. Although the Macedonians conquered the Persian Empire by force, the integration of Iranian elites became essential to maintain power over the foreign lands. The same applies to 'Asian' troops, who were integrated into the Macedonian army from the death of Darius III onward. They already became important before Alexander started the invasion of India

[127] Henkelman (2010); Kistler (2010); Cf. Spawforth (2007).

[128] Olbrycht (2015a, 2017); For the problematic term 'Persianization' in the light of recent definitions for the different forms of cultural borrowing, see Strootman and Versluys (2017); Cf. Rollinger (2009).

[129] Degen (2021b); Matarese (2013); Rollinger (2011).

[130] Collins (2012).

[131] Spawforth (2012); On Alexander's Iranian policy, see Olbrycht (2010: 351–368); Harrison (2018); Nawotka (2021).

[132] Rollinger (2016b).

[133] Plut. Dem. 25, 3; Cf. Nawotka (2012: esp. 352–354); Muccioli (2004).

and afterwards their number began to increase significantly.[134] Seen against this backdrop, it was in 330 the latest that the conquest of all 'Asia' became an imperial project involving Macedonians *and* local elites.

However, Alexander did not only achieve the conquest of the Achaemenid Empire by seeking cooperation of local elites. No one would seriously doubt that the conquest was mainly a military enterprise in which the Macedonian imperial army proved its military supremacy.[135] Interestingly modern history books generally present the four big battles (Granicus, Issus, Gaugamela, Hydaspes) as major stages of the campaign, but mostly eclipse the hard fighting in the East.[136] This is a biased view of the events since the period from Alexander entering the Zagros until his return from India to Babylon was dominated by more or less constant waging of war. During this time the conqueror had to invest much effort and resources to gain the upper hand. While it took the Macedonian army 4 years to advance through Asia Minor, the Levant, Mesopotamia and Western Iran, Alexander spent 5 years of hard fighting to gain mastery over the eastern parts of the Achaemenid Empire.[137] During these long wars in Sogdiana and Bactria Alexander III married Rhoxane, the daughter of the Bactrian satrap Oxyartes, just to gain control over the region so hard to subdue. Moreover, the conquest of the Indus Valley, too, turned out to be no easy task. The fierce resistance of the Indians caused harsh response by the invaders. The interpretation of these events either as the most gruesome part of Alexander's campaign or as an exploration of yet unknown parts of the world is still dividing modern scholarship in different fractions regarding the moralist assessment of his reign as 'good' or 'evil'.[138] Be that as it may, the campaigns in the East can also be interpreted in a different way, highlighting Alexander's sense for 'imperial knowledge'. In these late stages of his reign, the idea of world-conquest began to loom large for Alexander. Our sources refer to Cyrus II, Dionysus and Heracles as reference-points for his representation as a ruler.[139] All these figures were used by flattering writers in his entourage, whose works actually were the blueprint demonstrating Alexander's capacity of also outdoing his predecessors without explicitly mentioning an Achaemenid Great King. Staging the ability to move beyond the borders of the world was as important for Alexander as it was for his predecessors.[140] In addition, he presented himself as an incomparably successful ruler to a growing number of

[134] Olbrycht (2007, 2011).

[135] Worthington (2014).

[136] See, e.g., Tuplin (2014b).

[137] Howe (2016); Bosworth (1981); Holt (2012); Lerner (2016, 2018); Rapin (2017, 2018a); Rtveladze (2007, 2018).

[138] Rollinger and Degen (2021b); Worthington (1999); Bosworth (1996); Petrie (2021: 629–634, 641–645).

[139] Degen (2021c); Müller (2011).

[140] Rollinger and Degen (2021c).

Asian troops in his army.[141] All this can be seen as an ongoing process introducing the aspect of government into the agenda of the conqueror who became more and more eager to be appreciated as a righteous ruler in front of different and multi-ethnic audiences.

The fact that, in the end, Alexander's campaign, both in its factual and propagandistic dimension, was exactly framed by the most far-flung border areas of the Achaemenid Empire shows that it was less a discovery trip than brutal conquest.[142] Yet, Alexander payed a prize to meet his imperial aspirations in the East by weakening his young empire through neglecting consolidation of his power.[143] How important it was for him to maintain the extent of the Achaemenid Empire ('Asia') can be seen in the case of India. The conquest of the Punjab rather served symbolic and ideological purposes than an overall strategy of conquest, since immediately after Alexander had returned to Babylon, local elites regained power there. The young ruler seemed to have accepted the loss of direct rule only because he was still able to wield indirect authority over these regions.[144] Maintaining the extent of the Achaemenid Empire was not only important for Alexander but also for the so-called Successors. Although the wars of the Diadochi caused the fragmentation of the Macedonian World Empire, it, nevertheless, represented the point of reference for all claims to power by the Hellenistic kings.[145] During the early Hellenistic period, all Macedonian rulers claimed power over what classical sources called 'Asia', i.e. the Achaemenid Empire.[146] A good example is Hieronymus of Cardia's list of satrapies surviving in Diodorus' work. In this list it becomes clearly visible that the borders of the Achaemenid Empire framed the Macedonian World Empire.[147] Thus it appears that Alexander's conquest rather was a process of transferring Achaemenid rule into imperial Macedonian rule than bringing it to an abrupt end.

To sum up, from a certain time onward, Alexander was very well aware of what can be called 'imperial knowledge'.[148] He knew that imperial elites were key to a successful military submission of those parts of the Achaemenid Empire that still remained unconquered.[149] It took Alexander and his army more than three battles to bring at least the

[141] Degen (2021a–c); Rollinger and Degen (2021b).

[142] Degen (2022) (general discussion); Rollinger and Degen (2021b) (East, South); Bichler and Rollinger (2017) (North, East); Rollinger (2015); Coloru and Olivieri (2019) (East); Howe and Müller (2012) (East).

[143] For Persian as well as Macedonian resistance against Alexander, see Heckel (1997); Bosworth (1986); As well as the considerations of Badian (1964).

[144] Bosworth (1983).

[145] Schäfer (2014); Strootman (2020c); Cf. also Stark (2020).

[146] Strootman (2014a, b); Nawotka (2012).

[147] Diod. 18.5–6; For discussions of this topic see Klinkott (1999, 2000); Jacobs (1994); For the Macedonian World Empire under the reign of Perdiccas see Rathmann (2005).

[148] Degen (2022); Bosworth (1996).

[149] Of course, already as Macedonian king Alexander knew that exercising and maintaining power in an empire meant to negotiate power with elites. In the case of the Macedonians, see Müller (2003).

western half of the Achaemenid Empire to its knees. Henceforward, he shifted his representation as a ruler by adapting new elements. Rather than 'Hellenization' Alexander stimulated a process leading to the formation of a new imperial society in which local elites were involved. One may discuss whether this process was only accomplished with the Seleucids but it clearly started with Alexander who slowly transformed from a conqueror—conquest for the conquest's sake—into a ruler. Moreover, his conquest of the Achaemenid Empire did not result in the dominance of a single culture only as it is still believed by many modern historians. This phenomenon famously labelled as 'Hellenization' was rather a dynamization of cultural encounters.[150] Seen from this perspective, Alexander ruled over an empire in which a Macedonian *ethno-classe dominate* held the highest offices, but the imperial agents nevertheless had different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.[151] Thus it appears that the label 'Macedonian' had less an ethnic connotation than it became a socially constructed, supra-local and non-ethnical—in the sense of alleged 'common-origin'—marker for imperial elites.[152] In this regard, the power structures of the Macedonian World Empire did not differ substantially from its Achaemenid role model.

5 Comparative Aspects and Conclusion

Evaluating the deeper reasons for the end of a specific empire in a non-simplistic way is a difficult and challenging task. Unfortunately, just referring to established facts is rather unsatisfying. Alexander's successful campaign is a fact as his victories at the decisive battles at Granicus, Issus and Gaugamela are, too. But this kind of information does not tell us anything about the reasons for this success, be it Alexander's strength or Darius' III alleged weakness. Of course, events urge to be explained. This was already the case during the campaign and immediately afterwards. The grand narrative established in these contexts was successful for more than two millennia. But actually, this success of a biased narrative reveals more about the creators and recipients as well as their cultural 'framing' than about historical circumstances, structures and preconditions. However, it is one thing

[150] See the fundamental treatments of 'Hellenism' by Strootman (2020a: 120, b); Strootman and Versluys (2017); Bichler (1983).

[151] Briant (2017b: 29); Fox (2007, 2010); Wiemer (2007); For the term *ethno-classe dominante* see Briant (1988); Basello (2021); It is important to note that not only in Achaemenid times the Ethno-classe dominante was a socially constructed political identity. People with different cultural and regional identities could become 'Persian', see Colburn (2020a). This process already started in Neo-Assyrian times as the example of Šamaš-šumu-ukīn demonstrates, an Assyrian prince who consciously designed himself as Babylonian king (partly also according to the principles Assyrians regarded to represent 'Babylonianism'); See Zaia (2019a). This flexibility of the concept must also hold true for the Macedonian Ethno-classe dominante.

[152] For 'Greekness' in Hellenism, see Strootman (2020a: 120): "Greekness became in certain contexts a non-ethnic, supra-local identity. . .".

to deconstruct an established master narrative, but another one to offer a plausible alternative. Such an endeavor is always bound to 'assessment' and this can never be entirely convincing. There will be counterarguments over and over as in a scholarly context such arguments are most welcome. However, 'assessments' can and should be weighed and there should be accepted measuring sticks for such balancing. One such crucial measuring stick is historical comparison for it opens up a larger perspective. Indeed, there is a broad range of *comparanda* available which can be taken into account. Especially interesting are those examples originating from the ancient world like the preceding Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires or the succeeding Arsacid and Sasanian empires. Such a view can offer promising insights concerning obvious similarities but also differences.

Scholars who cannot accept the traditional reasoning for the downfall of the Achaemenid Empire and its alleged weakness in the fourth c. BCE anymore have proposed the idea of an entirely unexpected end of state and dynasty due to Alexander's campaign. This is what Josef Wiesehöfer described as 'Katastrophenmodell', model of catastrophe.[153] However, it has to be confessed that the term does not really describe and explain the historical events. A catastrophe does not need to be unexpected. Moreover, though not necessarily, it implies a hit out of the blue, a single and decisive strike with utmost consequences. Finally, the term is not neutral but reveals partisanship for those who 'suffer' and face rupture and loss. Alexander's crossing of the Hellespont was not entirely unexpected although his move beyond the Euphrates might have been so. But his success was for sure not achieved by a single strike but by a protracted war with heavy losses full of privations.[154] This war lasted nearly 10 years and met stiff resistance at many places. This resistance even continued after the death of the last legitimate king as the harsh fighting in Sogdia, Bactria, and Achaemenid India testifies to. One reason for this resilience and robustness of the Achaemenid Empire was the widespread acceptance of empire and dynasty by imperial and local elites.[155] This was key for its success and sturdiness. The backbone of this structural strength was the widespread acceptance of the Achaemenid dynasty. Established by Darius I and structurally anchored in deep ground by Xerxes I and Artaxerxes I its members successfully ruled the empire for nearly 200 years which is a rather long time, also in comparative perspective.[156] In this long period the dynasty was never challenged. Admittedly, there was intrigue and upheaval, subversion and regicide *within* the royal family but

[153] Wiesehöfer (1996: 39–40); followed by Rollinger (2014a, b: 167–168); See also Wiesehöfer (2007a).

[154] Tuplin (2014b), whose overall assessment is close to the idea of a "Katastrophenmodell" talks about a swift downfall (as he does for the Neo-Assyrian empire). However, this is a mis-judgement for both cases.

[155] For the concept of resilience see Haldon (2016); Haldon et al. (2020). Haldon's topic is the fundamental question for the successful survival of the (East) Roman Empire after the catastrophes of the seventh century CE. The concept of resilience is important since it changes perspective. Agency is not anymore ascribed to the conqueror only but to the defender as well.

[156] Rollinger and Degen (2021a).

never a comparable external challenge. Except the internecine war between Artaxerxes II and Cyrus the Younger in 401 BCE such cases of turbulence were restricted to the court and just remained 'episodes' without further consequences for the empire and its structures and existence.[157] Even the exception, i.e. the war between the brothers Artaxerxes II and Cyrus the Younger which heavily affected the western regions did not cause any serious damage to the empire.[158] Such a structural strength and resilience was not shared by all preceding and succeeding empires as the chronologies of their downfall demonstrate.

The Neo-Babylonian empire, though impressive in its dimension, was never able to establish a stable dynasty that gained acceptance beyond the third generation.[159] Admittedly, at least as far as we know, turbulences in the course of dynasty change were restricted to the court, but a general problem of lacking legitimacy is nonetheless discernible. Interestingly, this was also openly communicated. Neriglissar frankly referred to his non-royal father Bēl-šumu-iškun[160] as did Nabonidus with Nabû-balāssu-iqbi.[161] Already Nabopolassar, the founder of the empire presented himself as "son of a nobody" (*mār lā mammanim*).[162] However, as the usurpations of Nabû-šumu-līšir (603 BCE), an anonymous pretender (596 BCE), and Bāba-aha-iddin (596 BCE) testify,[163] the acceptance of the ruling kings did not rest on firm ground. Neriglissar, who probably married to a daughter of Nebukadnezzar II, was of Aramean descent, and tensions between north and south are recognizable.[164] This general problem of lacking legitimacy was enhanced by the enthronement of Amēl-Marduk (560 BCE), son of Nebukadnezzar II and the boy-king Lā-abâš-Marduk (556 BCE), son of Neriglissar. Nabonidus openly regarded both of them as 'bad', i.e. illegitimate, rulers in his inscriptions.[165] The broad reference in multi-variant vocabulary to anonymous foes and rebels in the inscriptions of Nebukadnezzar II and

[157] Thomas (2017).

[158] Binder (2021).

[159] Rollinger (2021b).

[160] Da Riva (2013: 14–15), 116 (NeglC21/1: i 11 = NeglC21/2 i 11) [RINBE 2, Neriglissar 1, i 11], 128 (NeglC23/1: i 14 = NeglC23/2 i 12 = NeglC23/6 I 13 = NeglC21/7 i 12), 136 (NeglC011 I 11) [RINBE 2, Neriglissar 3, i 14].

[161] For the references see Schaudig (2001: 709); Cf. also Da Riva (2008: 17).

[162] Da Riva (2013: 57) (NaplC12/1: 4 = NaplC12/2 4), 94 (NaplC32: 8). Cf. Fuchs (2014); Jursa (2007a); Da Riva (2017).

[163] Weidner (1954/56); Tyborowski (1996); Da Riva (2008: 10f., 2013: 10).

[164] Popova (2015: 404–407); See also Weiershäuser and Novotny (2020: 1–3).

[165] This is entirely clear for Lā-abâš-Marduk who is qualified as "untutored in proper behavior he ascended the royal throne against the will of the gods": RINBE 2, Nabonidus 3 (Babylon Stele) iv 39′–42′. In broken context the same inscription aligns Lā-abâš-Marduk together with Amēl-Marduk but due to the lost passages it is not clear how they are characterized in this part of the text: RINBE 2, Nabonidus 3 (Babylon Stele) v 25′–34′. Later Babylonian tradition saw Amēl-Marduk mainly as a negative king. Weiershäuser and Novotny (2020: 1); But there appears to have existed also a positive view. Cf. Jursa and Debourse (2017, 2019, 2020).

Neriglissar can also be taken as evidence for this kind of uncertainties,[166] as Nabonidus' 10 years absence from Babylon and his stay at the Arabian oasis of Tayma reveals a potential of conflict and disagreement with the imperial elites in Babylon.[167] This is even the more important as the legitimacy of a Babylonian king was less a question of ethnicity as one related to the king's presence in Babylon, his approval by Marduk (and by the priests acting on god's behalf), and the appropriate maintenance of and respect for religious traditions.[168] The consequences of this weakness can be immediately observed when the empire was challenged by a strong opponent from outside. As the so-called Nabonidus Chronicle reveals the empire broke down within 1 month.[169] There was one single battle lost at Opis and the empire crumbled like a sandcastle. There was no siege, Sippar and Babylon opened their gates to the victors and the game was over.[170] These events much more bear the ingredients of a 'catastrophe' than the protracted downfall of the Achaemenid empire does. A structural weakness caused by a certain lack of legitimacy and a strong and decisive opponent from outside generated a swift collapse.[171] There can be no doubt that Darius III faced a decisive opponent with Alexander III as Nabonidus did with Cyrus but apparently the structure of the Neo-Babylonian and the Achaemenid empire was rather different.

Interestingly, the successful conqueror Cyrus faced the same problems as his immediate predecessors.[172] He was as absent from Babylon as Nabonidus was and in the end, he could

[166] The terms in question are in the inscriptions of Nebukadnezzar II: *lā māgirū*, *ajjābu*, *nakru*, *mugallitu*; in the inscriptions of Neriglissar: *zā'iru*, *šāninu*, *mugallitu*, *ajjābu*, *zāmânû*, *lā māgirū*; in the inscriptions of Nabonidus: *šaršarrānu*. For details and references see Rollinger (2016c: 141 with n. 53).

[167] Cf. Hausleiter (2019); Da Riva (2019).

[168] Waerzeggers (2015: 187–188); See also Zaia (2019a); Seen from this background essential ingredients of the "Late Babylonian Priestly Literature" (4th–2nd c. BCE) appear to be recognizable already earlier. See Jursa and Debourse (2019, 2020).

[169] Grayson (2000: 109) (Nabonidus Chronicle iii 12–17).

[170] Whatever the *raison d'être* of Nebuchadnezzar's gigantic wall-building project to the north and south of Babylon were [Da Riva (2010)], this 'defensive system' proved to be completely useless; If planned as such, it is one of the most striking examples in world history that gigantic wall buildings designed to keep away potential enemies and foes represent a rather fruitless endeavor. Cf. also Brown (2017: 9f). "As political responses to what is physically, economically, and politically unmanageable in a globalized world, walls constitute a spectacular screen for fantasies of restored sovereign potency and national purity. They function brilliantly as icons of such potency and protection, even when they fail. If they also intensify conflicts and compound problems ranging from organized crime to broken national budgets and strained ecosystems, this does not make them less politically effectual".

[171] There may also be geographical considerations since the Neo-Babylonian empire never had a strong grip into central western Iran. This means that the enemy could advance rather fast into the Babylonian heartland. Cf. Rollinger (2021a: 105).

[172] Rollinger (2021b); See also Joannès (2020).

not establish a stable dynasty[173] as the ruling house collapsed with the death of Cambyses[174]. The empire then faced more than 1 year of serious transregional turbulences and internal fighting that only ended with the establishment of a new, and this time stable dynasty by Darius I.

Reviewing these *comparanda*, it becomes apparent that the downfall of an empire does not follow a monocausal pattern. The relative weakness of the Neo-Babylonian empire would not have been a serious problem without the appearance of a challenging opponent from outside as the crisis after the death of Cambyses was *also* successfully managed because there was no aggressive contender from outside. One further reason for the problems that came along with the Teispids Cyrus and Cambyses was the obvious lack of transregional elite identities. Whereas regional elite identities were still strong as the examples of Babylon and Egypt attest,[175] they did not exist in the same way in an empire-wide dimension.[176] Cambyses' long absence from the former imperial centers and his protracted stay in Egypt that can somehow be compared with Nabonidus' stay in Tayma added its grain of sand to this deficiency. This structural problem was only solved with the establishment of an imperial elite by Darius which Pierre Briant classified as "*ethno-classe dominante*".[177]

These observations take us back to an already mentioned important factor in evaluating an empire's downfall, i.e. its capacity for resilience and resistance and the time it takes for its vanquishing. Two empires with strong structures comparable to the Achaemenid Empire are the Neo-Assyrian and Sasanian empire.[178] Both were ruled for centuries by both a well-established and accepted dynasty with broad acceptance by imperial and regional elites. Usurpations by pretenders from outside the royal house were the exception to the rule. In both cases, there were certain elements of exhaustion discernible that evolved before the definite downfall. For Assyria this is the internecine war between Ashurbanipal and

[173] For an ongoing soaring of prizes under the Teispids, especially barley, that already started at the end of Nabonidus' reign and reached a peak under Darius, I see Pirngruber (2018: 22) who also qualifies Cyrus' conquest of Babylon as "a greater break with the preceding decades than has been assumed in recent scholarship"; Beaulieu (2018: 248–249) postulates a "smooth transition", respectively an "easy transition"; Cf. also Jursa (2007b).

[174] Thus, from a certain perspective, one could qualify the Teispid empire of Cyrus and Cambyses as a "short term empire". For the concept see Rollinger et al. (2020).

[175] Brosius (2021: 199–200); Waerzeggers (2014); Waerzeggers and Seire (2018); Stevens (2020); Wijnsma (2018).

[176] Already the Teispids made efforts to establish such an imperial elite of course as the example of Udjahorresnet demonstrates. By wearing a garment that evoked the Persian 'court robe' and lion-headed bracelets on his wrists he showcased 'Persian identity'. See Colburn (2020b).

[177] See above n. 151.

[178] Defining the change from the Arsacid to the Sasanian empire as a change of dynasty or a change of empire is a matter of debate. See Pourshariati (2008); Shayegan (2011); Wiesehöfer (2014). In any case, it took only one single battle to successfully establish this change. Cf. Daryaee (2009: 2–6), and the contribution by Rahim Shayegan in this volume.

Šamaš-šūmu-ukīn (652–648)[179] as well as the crisis after Ashurbanipal's death with the emergence of boy-kings, rivalries within the royal family and a range of usurpations unprecedented so far.[180] Beyond these turbulences two powerful challengers appeared on the scene. One originated from inside the empire, i.e. Nabopolassar who rebelled around 625 BCE and united the economically important regions of Babylonia against its former Assyrian suzerain.[181] The other one came from outside, i.e. the Median confederation of central western Iran.[182] Withstanding all these challenges it took the Babylonian-Median coalition about 15 years of continuous fighting to bring down the empire. Even the loss of the major residences Assur (614 BCE) and Nineveh (612 BCE) and the death of the last 'regular' king Sîn-šarru-iškun did not mean the end of the empire. It had to be beaten down until the very end and only disappeared with the conquest of Harran and the death of its last king Aššur-uballiṭ II (609 BCE).[183] Such kind of ongoing harsh resistance was only possible due to still extant deeply rooted imperial structures including still prevalent royal legitimacy and acceptance by the elites.

The same holds true for the end of the Sasanian Empire.[184] With the enthronement of Khusrow II certain problems were emerging as the usurpations of Wahrām Čōbīn (690 CE) and Wistahm (695 CE) suggest. Especially Wahrām Čōbīn's rebellion implied a new dimension of challenge since the usurper was not a member of the Sasanian royal house but a scion of the family of Mehrān. However, all these problems were not only successfully managed by Khusrow II but in the following years the empire was led to unsurpassed reach in a war of more than 25 years against the Roman Empire (602–628 CE). For some years with Syria and Egypt the Shah and his army even controlled the economically most powerful provinces of the Roman Empire. They raided vast areas of Anatolia and even laid siege on Constantinople (626 CE). However, in this 'total war' the Roman empire and its emperor Heraclius stood the ground.[185] With the help of the *qaghan* of the western Turkic

[179] See Brinkman (1984: 93–104); Frame (2007: 131–190); Novotny and Jeffers (2018. 22–24); Cf. also Zaia (2019b).

[180] For details see Fuchs (2014), and the contribution of Simonetta Ponchia in this volume. The two boy-kings were Aššur-etel-ilāni and Sîn-šarru-iškun who were challenged by the usurpers Nabû-rehtu-uṣur, Sîn-šumu-iškun, Itti-ili, and finally Nabopolassar.

[181] For his origins see Jursa (2007a); Da Riva (2017); Cf. also Popova (2015: 401–404) with a summary of the status quaestionis.

[182] Cf. Rollinger (2020); See also Lanfranchi (2021) who qualifies the Medes as a former internal actor of the Neo-Assyrian empire.

[183] Radner (2018).

[184] Cf. the contribution of Touraj Daryaee in this volume, and see also Akbarzadeh (2020).

[185] See Howard-Johnston (1999a, 2021); Raum (2021); According to Wiesehöfer (2010: 139): "one of the most astonishing turning-points in the history of Antiquity"; Cf. also Howard-Johnston (2010); Leppin (2020); Viermann (2021).

empire[186] he was able to launch a decisive counter-attack in the course of which Khusrow II was killed by a revolt of the imperial aristocracy (628 CE).[187] What followed was a short period of anarchy with frequently changing rulers[188] comparable to what happened in Assyria after the death of Ashurbanipal. Nonetheless, the empire did not collapse although exhausted and ruled by a Shah with tarnished legitimacy. Yet the next challenge was already ascending when the Muslim invasion started in 636 CE. Its relative weakness notwithstanding it took the Arab armies 15 years to finally overcome the empire. In 637 a Sasanian counterattack was successful in the short-term when Arab forces were defeated in the 'battle of the bridge' and driven out of Mesopotamia. The regrouped Arab forces had to win two open battles at al-Qādisiyya (638) and Nihāwand (642) and face a long war in eastern Iran before Yazdgird III was finally killed at Marw (651) and the Sasanian Empire found an end.[189]

What do we learn from this kind of comparisons for the Achaemenid Empire? First of all, despite some internal problems after the death of Artaxerxes III the Achaemenid Empire was not in decline when Alexander approached its borders. Even if the Greek stories about the alleged machinations of Bagoas are not pure anti-barbarian fantasy and entertaining storytelling,[190] the imperial structures were still working and stable in the 340's as Darius III was a capable and active king.[191] The long resistance and resilience against Alexander's invasion that even continued after Darius' murder are telling testimonies for the still existing dynamics of the empire and the prestige of the Achaemenid king even after the loss of two decisive battles,[192] Issus (333) and Gaugamela (331) and the conquest of the major residences Babylon, Persepolis, and Susa by the invaders. Of course, the final collapse had a lot to do with the external enemy. The success of the invaders can be explained in many ways. For sure it is not the weakness of the Achaemenid Empire and an

[186] Howard-Johnston (1996: 65–67, 2016: 590–591); Golden (2018: 330). See also Rollinger and Wiesehöfer (in press).

[187] Wiesehöfer (2010: 139). For the disastrous inundations in Iraq, the dramatic loss of farming land, and the Tigris changing its riverbed in 628 see Verkinderen (2015: 11).

[188] Through the enthronement of Yazdgird III in 633 CE there were eight pretenders within five years: Kawād II (628), Ardashīr III (628–630), Shahrbarāz (630), Khusrau III (630), Queen Pūrān (630–631), Queen Āzarmīgdukht (631), Hormezd V (631–632), and finally Khusrau IV (631–633). See Wiesehöfer (2010: 152); For the queens: Wiesehöfer (2021); Short and MacDonald (2021).

[189] Wiesehöfer (2010: 112); The surviving members of the Sasanian dynasty fled to China: Daryaee (2019: 41).

[190] Brosius (2021: 204–205); At royal courts, in particular the Achaemenid and Hellenistic ones, important persons could become "favorites" and thus were able to accumulate power. Strootman (2017); This finally reshaped the landscape of power at the courts of the Achaemenid Great King and Alexander, as it has been argued by Degen (2021b).

[191] Brosius (2021: 207–217).

[192] The battle at the river Granicus (334) was fought by Achaemenid satraps not by the Great King.

alleged failure of its military strength.[193] In any case, the Macedonian opponent was staunch and most determined which is not self-evident.[194] We do not exactly know from which point in time onwards Alexander III intended to conquer the entire empire.[195] If not yet extant from the beginning this desire started to emerge after the battle of Issus when Alexander invaded Syria. This vigorous intention to conquer the entire empire as well as Alexander's charisma to convince his entourage and his soldiers for this final goal cannot be over-estimated. He could have been content with less, but he was not. However, such an unwavering determination is not an absolute guarantee for success. Khusrow II might have had a comparable attitude when, at the heyday of his military achievements, he denied a generous offer of Heraclius to stand down and "allow the Roman empire to become a Persian client-state".[196] In the end, his unshakeable focus on absolute victory turned out in a catastrophe. Why was Alexander successful and Khusrow II not? This is difficult to answer and might be explained by contingency or factors that cannot be really controlled by historical agents. Whereas issues related to the qualifications and non-qualifications of persons are always problematic to be addressed appropriately it is somehow easier with structures. The most obvious common feature in comparing the collapse of the Neo-Assyrian, Achaemenid and Sasanian empire is the fact that their challenging opponents, determined as they were, after a longstanding and harsh war of many years with a whole range of battles had to advance to the furthermost corners of these empires to guarantee victory and final success.[197] This allows only one conclusion: To their utmost end these empires were intact and vigorous by exhibiting astonishing resilience until their very last breath.[198]

Thus, what brought the collapse of the Achaemenid empire is less appropriately explained by a 'model of catastrophe' than by a Janus-faced 'model of extinction and

[193] Manning (2021); Tuplin and Jacobs (2021); See also Tuplin (2017b).

[194] Tuplin (2014b: 691) highlights the "size of Alexander's force and his adhesion to a strategy of deep penetration".

[195] See the discussion above.

[196] Howard-Johnston (1999b: 212). The event is dated to 615 CE when Sasanian forces reached for the first time the outskirts of Constantinople. The most important sources are the Armenian History of Sebeos [122–123 = Chapter 38] (Thomson 1999: 78–80) and the Chronicon Paschale, Olympiad 348 [p. 705–709] (Whitby 1989: 159–162); See the commentary by Howard-Johnston (1999b: 210–213).

[197] Recent research also attributed the collapse, at least of the Neo-Assyrian and Sasanian empire, to climate change. See Sinha et al. (2019) (Neo-Assyrian empire) and Büntgen et al. (2016) (Sasanian empire).

[198] Briant (2010: 26–27, 180–182) rightly highlights the fact that one major reason for Alexander's success was the well working Achaemenid infrastructure with its road system and magazines replete with supplies. See also Briant (2018, 2021: 71–72); Rollinger (2013: 58–73); Rop (2018) also highlights the stability and effectiveness of the empire built upon transparent judicial processes that guaranteed fealty and loyalty towards the Great King; Cf. also Hyland (2018b).

transformation'.[199] This was achieved by a determined opponent who did not shy away from the highest costs to vanquish the empire in many years of ongoing brutal fighting. At the very same time he eagerly copied and transformed imperial structures to save his conquest.[200] Obviously, he was much more successful with the first than with the latter as events after Alexander's early death immediately demonstrate.[201] What had been kept successfully for more than 200 years by the Achaemenids was actually destroyed within a little bit more than 10 years when the body of the former Achaemenid Empire crumbled. The real irony, however, is that history as well as most modern historians were and still are prepared to uncritically follow a biased discourse of the classical sources for more than two millennia. Celebrating the (western) conqueror, highlighting his alleged 'exploration' of an ever-dawning 'oriental' world[202] that secretly waited for the 'light of the west' is still, even if not pronounced straight forward, a popular stance, even in our days.[203]

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[199] The model could also be applied to the Neo-Assyrian and Sasanian empire, since after collapse in both cases vibrant processes of transformation are discernible. See for the Neo-Assyrian empire Da Riva (2014); Jursa (2010); Kreppner (2008); Kühne (2002); Radner (2017); Sandowicz (2017); for the Sasanian empire see Hämeen-Anttila (2018); Heidemann (2010); Penn (2015: 6–17); Pourshariati (2008); Robinson (2010: 208–221). Cf. also now Howard-Johnston (2022: 109): "I have deliberately avoided using the word *conquest*, because, to my mind, the Arabs did *not* conquer Iran, they *inserted* themselves into a huge upland territory with a distinctive character, a rich cultural endowment (religious and secular) inherited from the deep past, and an enduring consciousness of its special role in history" (italics by Howard-Johnston).

[200] Note also that the archives in Bactria do not show any rupture. After an Artaxerxes (= Bessus) there just follows a certain Alexander: Shayegan (2005: 171–175); Briant (2018: 35–39); Gzella (2021b); Cf. also Lhuillier (2018).

[201] Cf. Dusinberre (2019); Stark (2020: 82–83).

[202] Briant (2010: 26): "But to reduce his (scil. Alexander's) expedition to a personal adventure runs the risk of landing us in a position of some absurdity".

[203] Cf. the critical observations by Briant (2006, 2008).

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The End of the Roman Empire: Civil Wars, the Imperial Monarchy, and the End of Antiquity

Henning Börm

> From the Ocean, from Britain, Spain, Gaul, Italy, Greece, Thrace to Egypt and Africa and Upper Africa, the boundaries of the Romans and the statues of the emperors were seen until our own times. For all peoples submitted to them at God's command. Now, however, we see the Roman Empire reduced and humbled.

It was with these words that an unknown Greek author described the state of the world in the middle of the seventh century CE.[1] Just a few years earlier, the Great Arab Conquests had begun,[2] forcing the Romans to abandon control of Syria, Egypt, and North Africa, while the second Great Power of Late Antiquity, the Sasanian Monarchy,[3] perished altogether.[4] During the following decades, what was left of the Roman state was transformed into what is known today as the Byzantine Empire.[5]

Nevertheless, when talking about the end of the Roman Empire, most people do not think of the seventh but of the fifth century, when imperial rule over most of Western Europe dissolved. To many, these events marked not only the end of the Western Roman Empire, but *the* end of an empire par excellence, since, at least according to a Eurocentric

[1] *Doctrina Iacobi nuper Baptizati* (ed. Bonwetsch), 62.4–12.

[2] Among the many accounts of early Arab expansion, Kennedy (2008) is, in my opinion, the best; In addition, Hoyland (2015) is worth reading, sometimes representing somewhat idiosyncratic positions.

[3] Cf. Daryaee (2009); Wiesehöfer (2010); Bonner (2020).

[4] Cf. Pourshariati (2008: 161–281).

[5] Cf. Haldon (1997: 41–91).

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tradition, the Roman Empire had been *the* empire par excellence. Actually, it is hard to find an empire whose story is told so often from the end. Old notions of ascent, flowering, and decadence are still very powerful here, and in recent years those who whisper of the imminent downfall of Western civilization often refer to the end of the Roman Empire.[6]

Because this topic still fascinates so many people, the number of explanations that have been suggested over time is unmanageably large.[7] The crucial question, which is answered very differently to this day, is whether it was mainly internal or mainly external developments that played a key role in the events. Nobody denies that warriors and warlords of non-Roman origin played a prominent role during the events;[8] and the fact that the fifth century CE was, all in all, a pretty violent time can hardly be denied. However, opinions differ widely about the reasons for this. Before outlining my own position, I will therefore give a brief overview of the main explanatory models.

Still popular, especially outside academia, is Edward GIBBON's idea that Christianization weakened the Later Roman Empire because the Church had bound up enormous resources and because dogmatic conflicts had destroyed inner peace, distracting the emperors from defending the borders. This observation is not fundamentally wrong; however, since these phenomena were even more common in the Roman East than in the West, they can hardly explain the end of imperial rule in Europe. Incidentally, after having witnessed the French Revolution, GIBBON himself favored other explanations.[9]

Fortunately, another hypothesis, once very influential, is no longer put forward by serious scholars: In the early twentieth century, Houston Stewart CHAMBERLAIN and Alfred ROSENBERG claimed that since about 200 CE, the Roman Empire had become weak and decadent due to "racial mixing"; in their eyes, only the immigration of "Aryan" Germans into the Mediterranean had saved European civilization.[10] This thesis is so nonsensical that I do not have to go into detail here. Much less disgusting, but also outdated, is the Marxist idea that the ancient slave-holding society of the Later Roman Empire was eliminated by a revolution, replacing it with a feudalist society.[11] However, there is insufficient evidence to support this theory that is moreover unable to explain the different developments in East and West.

[6] Cf. Gillett (2017).

[7] The best overview is probably given by Demandt (2014). In a famous list at the very end of his book, he assembles 227 various explanations for the "Fall" of the Roman Empire which have been advanced over the centuries; cf. Demandt (2014: 719); See also Lançon (2017).

[8] Cf. Halsall (1999); Cameron (2011: 39–57); Wijnendaele (2018); For the foreseeable future, the standard work on the "Migration Period" will be the monumental synthesis: Meier (2019). I have explained my own view of the history of the Western Roman Empire in detail elsewhere; cf. Börm (2018).

[9] Cf. Nippel (2006).

[10] Cf. Demandt (2014: 368–391).

[11] Cf. Günther (1984: 5–23); See also Demandt (2014: 283–287).

Let us now move on to positions that are actually still advocated in the current scholarly discussion: Some years ago, Averil Cameron, picking up ideas that Paul Kennedy had developed in terms of modern empires,[12] suggested that the Roman Empire had failed because of its own greatness—the profits that the vast territory brought were, she claimed, not enough to allow the defense in the long run.[13] However, this too raises the question of how to explain the different developments in East and West. Scholars such as Helmuth Schneider, in turn, think that the personal inability of the emperors from the Theodosian Dynasty, who ruled the empire between 379 and 455,[14] was responsible for the events.[15] But again, this cannot explain why the Roman East was so much more successful than the West. Also noteworthy are scholars such as Kyle Harper, who do not consider human action as crucial factor, but assume that climate change was responsible for the weakness of the Later Roman Empire: In their eyes, a "Late Antique Little Ice Age" (or LALIA) led to crop failures and disease, decisively weakening the financial and military strength of the empire.[16] However, since these phenomena were not exclusive to the Roman West, they too cannot explain the events satisfactorily—that is, if we're not dealing with a spurious correlation anyway.

The most famous and perhaps oldest explanation for the end of the Roman Empire is, of course, that the Romans succumbed to the pressure of barbarian invaders. Already in 1947 André Piganiol had coined the famous formula that the Roman Empire had not died of natural causes but had been murdered.[17] After 1980, under the influence of Peter Brown and his students,[18] this idea initially took a back seat, as cultural-historical questions became the center of attention, and instead of "decline and fall" it was—wisely—preferred to talk about "transformation".[19] But for the last 15 years or so, researchers such as Alexander Demandt, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and especially Peter Heather have strongly re-emphasized the role of barbarian warriors in the events.[20] Simplistically, Heather's

[12] Cf. Kennedy (1987).

[13] Cf. Cameron (2011: 211 f.); See also Woolf (1990); See also Merrony (2017).

[14] Cf. Blockley (1998).

[15] Cf. Schneider (2000); A very different view can be found in McEvoy (2013), arguing that child emperors such as Honorius (393–423) generally ruled successfully due to a conscious division of labor with the *magistri militum*.

[16] Cf. Büntgen et al. (2016); Harper (2017); Loveluck et al. (2018). This position has immediately met with opposition by other scholars; cf. Haldon et al. (2018).

[17] Cf. Piganiol (1947). "La civilization romaine n'est pas morte de sa belle mort. Elle a été assassinée" (422).

[18] Cf. Wood (2016); Brown (2003). probably gives the best impression of his view of Late Antiquity.

[19] Cf. Pohl (2016: 46 f). In this context belongs the discussion of whether it makes sense to regard the period between the third and eight century CE as a "Long Late Antiquity", abandoning the old periodization which considered the deposition of the last Western Roman emperor in 476 or the death of Justinian in 565 to be of crucial importance; cf. Marcone (2008).

[20] Cf. Rutenburg and Eckstein (2007).

model can be summarized as follows: He claims that with the emergence of the Sasanian Monarchy in the third century CE, the military situation for the Romans had become more threatening, since most imperial troops would now have had to defend Syria.[21] So when in the later fourth century the Huns triggered a large movement of 'Germanic' peoples,[22] the Roman resources were insufficient to defend the Danube and Rhine frontiers.[23] According to HEATHER, the Romans were unable to bring the barbarians that invaded the Western empire between 376 and 406 under permanent control;[24] thus these invaders subjugated the Roman population, eventually founding their own empires.[25] Bryan WARD-PERKINS explains the survival of imperial rule in the East by the fact that the strategic location of Constantinople prevented Germanic warriors from crossing over to Asia Minor and Syria.[26]

That the final decades of the Roman Empire were indeed bound up with violence is undeniable. Although there were undoubtedly gradual processes of transformation, the overall brutality of the era can hardly be denied. However, I believe that one can explain the events better if one focuses on political developments *within* the empire. For example, if we declare the Sasanians far more effective than their predecessors, we run the risk of taking the self-representation of the new dynasty at face value. They apparently wanted not only to eliminate pockets of resistance in Armenia and Hatra, but also to drive the Romans out of Mesopotamia,[27] while there is no evidence that the first Sasanian kings were actually planning to conquer areas west of the Euphrates.[28] Although foreign warriors certainly did play a prominent role, barbarian attacks on the borders were, in my view, not of decisive importance for the dissolution of imperial rule.[29] Time and again, in the fourth and fifth centuries, Roman armies made clear that they were still able to protect the borders if

[21] "From the third century, when the Sasanian revolution worked its magic, Persia was indeed the second great superpower of the ancient world (. . .). The new military threat posed by the Sasanians plunged the Roman Empire into a military and fiscal crisis that lasted the best part of fifty years". Heather (2005: 386); Cf. in contrast, Rubin (2008). Who describes "the uncompromising threat posed by Iran to the Roman order" as a "myth" (130).

[22] In recent times, however, scholars have stressed how problematic the term "Germanic" is. Cf. Friedrich and Harland (2020).

[23] Cf. Kim (2013); Heather (2015).

[24] Cf. Heather (2005: 445–459).

[25] Of course, this process was particularly problematic in Italy. There, Theodoric was able to establish a new order in 493, which on the one hand can be regarded as a direct continuation of the Western Roman Empire, but on the other hand also as a *regnum* of the Ostrogoths. Cf. Amory (1997); Wiemer (2018).

[26] Cf. Ward-Perkins (2005: 58–62).

[27] Cassius Dio explicitly states that the establishment of the province of *Mesopotamia* in 198 was "a source of constant wars and great expense" to the Romans. Cf. Cass. Dio 75.3.2 f.

[28] Cf. Mosig-Walburg (2009: 61–63).

[29] Cf. Börm (2016b: 617–624).

stability prevailed inside the empire.[30] Neither was the Roman West conquered by foreign invaders like the Achaemenid Empire, nor was it a victim of inner decadence or overstretching its borders. In my opinion, what happened in the fifth century CE reminds us rather of the disintegration of the empire of Alexander the Great: endless power struggles in the center of the Western Empire led to a weakening of internal cohesion, while countless rulers and usurpers were killed between 375 and 475.[31]

If, then, internal instability was the main cause of the disintegration of imperial rule in the West, how can it be explained? Background of the problems was the special character of the Roman monarchy, going back to its founder, Augustus. In the years from 27 BCE onwards, he had established a new order, transforming the *res publica* into a monocracy by conferring special powers on the emperor.[32] But since this position was not part of the unwritten constitution of the *Imperium Romanum* until the very end, the rule of every Roman emperor was fundamentally precarious, for his legitimacy could be challenged more easily than in other monocratic systems. This explains the large number of attempts at usurpation to which the Roman rulers were exposed.[33]

The main task of any emperor was to ensure internal peace, the *pax Augusta*, because already Augustus had justified his outstanding position by claiming to have ended the civil wars once and for all.[34] If a ruler failed at this central point, it led to a loss of acceptance, sometimes leading to a vicious circle of civil wars[35] which threatened the legitimacy of imperial rule and the cohesion of the empire. This happened for the first time in the third century CE, when the Roman Empire already began to disintegrate before some vigorous rulers managed to stop the process for the time being.[36] However, when the *bella civilia* escalated a second time in the fifth century, this time only in the West, it was no longer possible to halt the development.

The answer to the civil wars of the third century had been the establishment of a multi-imperial system.[37] In the fourth century there were sometimes four, sometimes three, sometimes two emperors at the same time. However, the existence of several emperors

[30] From the first to the fourth century CE Roman troops made regular campaigns in the areas north of the Rhine, Danube and Hadrian's Wall in order to scare plunderers. On this, see for instance m. Cf. Wijnendaele (2015: 13 f).

[31] Cf. Szidat (2010); Omissi (2018).

[32] Cf. Winterling (2017); See also Gotter (2015).

[33] On the precarious position of a Roman *princeps*. See Flaig (1992: 174–209); Hartmann (1982). May be partly out of date, but in many respects it remains an illuminating analysis of third-century usurpations. Hartmann particularly emphasizes the border armies' need for *Kaisernähe*; Cf. also Johne (2008).

[34] *Postquam bella civilia exstinxeram*; Aug. res gest. 34.

[35] Remarkably enough, historians have not yet been able to agree on a definition of "civil war". Cf. Kalyvas (2007); Börm (2016a: 16–19).

[36] Cf. Ando (2012: 146–175).

[37] Cf. Börm (2018: 24–28).

did not change the fact that the Roman Empire was still regarded as a monocracy. Therefore, it always had to be clear who had the final say; for in a system that still propagated the rule of an *optimus princeps*, there could only be one who possessed the greatest authority in the entire empire.[38] Formally, this was the longest-serving emperor, the *senior Augustus*. But in the years between 350 and 450, there were often conflicts between different emperors. Since the *Imperium Romanum* remained formally undivided, rivalry and quarrels between the imperial courts created tensions that more often than not escalated into outright civil wars.

Especially one such rivalry between two imperial courts should prove fatal for the empire: For the West, the year 395 marks a turning point. As I said, the Roman Empire was never divided into two empires, not even in this year.[39] But important points were nevertheless set: In 394, the Emperor Theodosius the Great had subjugated and humiliated the Roman West in another bloody civil war.[40] In January 395, he died before being able to cure the schism between the two imperial courts, leaving the rule over the West to his little son, Honorius.[41] Presumably in order not to have to submit to his older brother, the *senior Augustus* Arcadius, who resided in Constantinople, the Western court claimed that the general Stilicho had been appointed by Theodosius as guardian over *both* emperors.[42] This claim was never accepted in the East, but in the West it made Stilicho unassailable. He took advantage of this situation, systematically strengthening the position of the *magister militum*, or "master of the soldiers", at the Western Court over the next 13 years.[43] This gave the military a position far stronger than at the Eastern court. At the Western court, in the decades after 395, emperors and their families therefore tried in vain to regain freedom of action and to repress the ever growing influence of the generals.[44]

In addition, there was another problem: because the Roman Empire was such a peculiar system, imperial succession had been problematic from the beginning.[45] Especially when an emperor had no biological son, ambitious men tried to build a connection to the imperial house through marriage. All this led repeatedly to constellations in which the succession in the empire was unclear, leading to the formation of different factions which wrestled with each other for the enforcement of their candidate.[46] In consequence, the influence of the

[38] Porphyr. apud. Macarius Magnes 6.20. Cf. Szidat (2010: 46–58).

[39] Cf. Sandberg (2008).

[40] Cf. Leppin (2003: 205–212). It has often been overlooked how much the elites at the western Roman court must have felt humiliated after the civil war, and how important it would have been if Theodosius had resided in Italy for some years after 395.

[41] On Honorius, cf. Bleckmann (1997); Näf (2013); Doyle (2018).

[42] Cf. Girardet (2008: 117–124); Börm (2018: 42–49).

[43] Cf. Janßen (2004); Kulikowski (2019: 123–164).

[44] Cf. Kuhoff (2012); Börm (2013: 75–84); Stickler (2016); Poguntke (2016).

[45] Cf. Börm (2015); Omissi (2018: 3–34).

[46] Cf. Börm (2018: 156–165) and Börm (2022).

military at the Western court grew even more rapidly, since the internal conflicts provoked foreign policy problems, the solution of which required competent military commanders.[47] In the endless civil wars that followed, the Roman government more and more often employed Germanic and Hunnic warriors as a sort of mercenaries, which cost much less than regular troops.[48] The prominent role played by these warriors in the internal wars of the fifth century has led to the widespread notion that the Roman West succumbed to barbarian invasions.[49] However, many of these warriors only took advantage of the latitude offered to them. Their goal was participation in the Roman Empire, not conquest.

The "barbarian invaders" who harassed the provincial population were in many—not all—cases simply marching armies who behaved in a ruthless and brutal manner in search of food and prey, as soldiers do at all times.[50] The fact that they were increasingly not regular Roman troops, but mercenaries from abroad who differed in their customs, their language and partly also their religion from the Romans, certainly did not reduce the horror which the members of this soldiery spread. However, it should be remembered that even regular Roman troops had been feared since the early Imperial period by the provincial population, because they often appeared as conquerors and occupiers.[51] Moreover, scholars such as Roland Steinacher have stressed in recent years that the cultural and ethnic boundaries between "Romans" and "barbarians" were rather fuzzy and blurred.[52]

Inextricably linked to this development was a gradual militarization of the elites,[53] which found its most visible expression in what archaeologists such as Philipp von Rummel have for some years called *habitus barbarus*, a new style of dress which ostentatiously ought to be masculine and martial, and which originated in the Roman Empire itself.[54]

[47] Among the generals who fought for control of the Western Roman government in the fifth century, there were Romans like Boniface: Cf. Wijnendaele (2015); Aetius: Cf. Stickler (2002); Orestes, as well as "barbarians" like Ricimer: Cf. Anders (2010); Cf. MacGeorge (2002). In practice, the ethnicity of these warlords seems to have played little role.

[48] Cf. Steinacher (2017: 124 f).

[49] Cf. Demandt (2014: 467–492); Lançon (2017: 125–141); Kulikowski (2018); Meier (2019: 1089–1104).

[50] Cf. Brown (2012). "They looted the countryside and shook down cities. These depredations are usually referred to, somewhat dramatically, as the 'barbarian invasions.' They were no such thing. They were collateral damage brought upon the provinces by contending emperors (. . .). Many 'barbarians' were little more than freelance pillagers and highwaymen" (388); cf. also Kulikowski (2013). A late antique Syrian chronicle describes impressively how regular imperial troops harassed and plundered the provincial population in a manner that was in no way different from the barbarian were accused of; Jos. Styl. 86.

[51] Cf. Knapp (2012: 237–244).

[52] Cf. Steinacher (2016). Arguing that the Vandals were in fact "Roman barbarians"; See also Greatrex (2000); Maas (2012); von Rummel (2013); Brather (2000), offers fundamental criticism of the ethnic interpretation of archaeological finds; C*ontra* Bierbrauer (2004); Cf. Brandt (2009).

[53] Cf. Börm (2010).

[54] Cf. von Rummel (2007).

Classical education, παιδεία, gradually lost its significance for the upper class as a status symbol; this contributed significantly to the loss of much of the ancient literature in the medium term. For this reason, neither barbaric invaders nor Christian censors were primarily responsible for the disappearance of Classical civilization,[55] but a cultural transformation process, which led to less and less pay for the upper classes to invest in areas that had been multiplying social capital for centuries. Euergetism dried up, only churches and monasteries were still donated.[56] The new aristocracy did not legitimize itself dynastically and therefore possessed a very high potential for integration; in addition to men of very different origins, it also included many Romans. In the later fifth century, Sidonius Apollinaris,[57] a member of the old senatorial elite (*ordo senatorius*) who was proud of his noble descent and education,[58] described this particular acculturation process with helpless contempt.[59] This transformation of the secular elites continued long after the end of antiquity.

In the end, it was hostile groups within the Western Roman ruling classes themselves who dragged the Visigoths,[60] Vandals,[61] Sueves and even the Huns[62] into their conflicts as they sought to use their fighting power against their internal enemies.[63] However, in the face of growing chaos, these mercenaries, who were called *foederati* because they had concluded a *foedus*, a treaty, with the Romans,[64] increasingly pursued their own interests. Gaiseric did this especially early, seizing Carthage in 439,[65] while other warlords were more hesitant. The "barbarians" who took advantage of the slow dissolution of the Roman frontier troops during the civil wars by invading the provinces[66] must therefore not be confused with the federate armies inside the Western Roman Empire, offering their services against the grant of money or food in order to give themselves and their families

[55] On Christian censorship in Late Antiquity. Cf. Rohmann (2016).

[56] On euergetism. Cf. Lepelley (1997).

[57] Cf. Harries (1994).

[58] On the late Roman *ordo senatorius* cf. Rebenich (2008). It is crucial to note that over the course of the fourth century, the old senatorial nobility had been transformed more and more into a dynastically legitimized aristocracy, while the newly emerging militarized elite understood itself mainly as a meritocracy.

[59] Sidon. Apoll. epist. 5.7.; Cf. Mathisen (1993).

[60] Cf. Heather (1991); Delaplace (2015).

[61] Cf. Steinacher (2016).

[62] Chron. Gall. a 452 ad ann. 433. This is not the place to discuss the old question of whether the first Huns who appeared in Europe in the fourth century were descendants of the *Hsiung-Nu* known from Chinese sources. Cf. Brosseder (2018).

[63] Cf. Börm (2018: 127–130).

[64] Cf. Stickler (2007).

[65] Prosp. Tiro ad ann. 439. Cf. Steinacher (2016: 120–125).

[66] Hieron. epist. 123.16 f.

a secure livelihood. It was them who, after the collapse of the central government, finally established their own *regna*.

From what point we can call these warrior groups "peoples" is open to discussion.[67] However, it may not be a coincidence that after the middle of the sixth century no more foreign groups found their way to Italy, Spain, and Gaul. Thus when a new political order had been established in the West, that which is traditionally called the "Barbarian invasions" came to an end as well, presumably because the warriors usually had been recruited by the empire.[68] The emergence of the post-Roman world was not so much the cause but rather the consequence of the decay of the Western Roman central power.

The civil war paradigm I am proposing by no means explains all the developments that affected the Western Empire in the fifth century. For example, it cannot be ruled out that important change had also taken place in the *Barbaricum*, increasing the pressure on the Roman borders.[69] But by stating that groups within the Western Roman ruling class were hostile to each other, thus weakening the defensive power of the empire, one can at least to some extent bring order to the apparent chaos of those decades.

It probably took people quite a long time to understand that the Western Roman central government would not recover this time. After all, in the third century, the emperors had had to deal with long civil wars as well, but finally got them under control and then stabilized the imperial borders again.[70] The failure to do so again 200 years later did not become obvious until 468, when the two imperial courts failed to bring the important territory of Carthage back under Roman control in a joint effort, and from that time onwards the rapid decay of imperial rule became unstoppable. In Britain, Gaul, Spain, Dalmatia, and, finally, Italy itself, ambitious warlords—some of them Romans—took the place of the Empire.[71]

To summarize: In my eyes, Roman society was haunted by the specter of civil war since the first century BCE.[72] The imperial monarchy was essentially based on the promise that only the almighty emperors could establish and maintain inner peace. But already the second *princeps*, Tiberius, is reported to have said that being emperor meant to hold a wolf

[67] Cf. Halsall (2007: 35–45 and 455–462).

[68] Cf. Halsall (2014: 528–531).

[69] Cf. Whittaker (1994: 132–19); Bleckmann (2009: 168–183); Nüsse (2013). Weapon deposits like those in the Thorsberg moor in Anglia, as well as a massacre in which a whole settlement was wiped out in the fifth century in what is today southern Sweden; Cf. Alfsdotter et al. (2018), could point to a period of profound unrest. However, it remains unclear whether these events were perhaps triggered by the troubles in the Roman Empire rather than causing them.

[70] Cf. Potter (2014: 264–294); Krause (2018: 61–64).

[71] Cf. Vanderspoel (2009); Moorhead (2013: 39–105); Mitchell (2015: 206–241). See also Fisher (2022: 571–580).

[72] Cf. Börm (2016a).

by the ears.[73] For centuries, the Roman monarchy resembled a dance on a volcano. Countless emperors were violently killed, and from the third century onwards it became increasingly difficult to control this problem, culminating in the disintegration of imperial rule in the West.[74] The position of emperor in Italy was abolished in 476 CE because it no longer promised stability and peace, but rather instability and civil war.[75] The Western Roman army had perished in the bloody conflicts,[76] and 'Germanic' warriors had taken their place. Now their leaders took control of the ruins of the Western Empire—who else should have?

But if this explanation is correct, if a structural legitimacy deficit explains the problems of the Roman monarchy and eventually the end of imperial rule in the West, why did the emperors in the East assert themselves so much better during the fifth and sixth centuries? And why did they still lose two-thirds of their territory to the Arabs in the seventh century?[77]

Around the year 400, while Stilicho was laying the foundations for the generals' commanding position at the western court,[78] decisions were made in the Roman East that ensured the survival of the empire. The most important was the permanent establishment of the imperial court in Constantinople. In the third and fourth the rulers had regularly accompanied armies to war.[79] That was over now.[80] Between 395 and 610 no Eastern Roman emperor acted as a general; and what is more, for more than 200 years, emperors left the metropolis on the Bosporus only in rare exceptions. Their most important power base was now Constantinople, which quickly became an impregnable fortress.[81] The population of the city could threaten emperors when it rioted,[82] but it could also

[73] *Cunctandi causa erat metus undique imminentium discriminum, ut saepe lupum se auribus tenere diceret*; Suet. Tib. 25.1.

[74] Henning (1999), offers a good study of the last emperors in the West; see also Wes (1967) (still valuable); Hughes (2015) (somewhat problematic); McEvoy (2017). In my opinion, however, the Western Roman Empire persisted for some decades after 476: from an institutional point of view, Justinian's *constitutio pragmatica* of 554, effectively abolishing the imperial court; Cf. McCormick (2000); Smith (2007). In Ravenna, marked the decisive turning point; cf. Börm (2018: 150–155).

[75] Marc. Com. ad ann. 476. How significant the deposition of the last Western Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, actually was, has been discussed for years. Cf. Croke (1983); Goltz (2009); Most recently, Meier (2014) has warned against underestimating the consequences of the year 476.

[76] Cf. Liebeschuetz (1993); Lee (2007: 74–100); Elton (2015).

[77] Cf. Howard-Johnston (2010: 461–473); Mitchell (2015: 458–463).

[78] Cf. Scharf (1990).

[79] Cf. Hekster and Zair (2008: 57–61); Hebblewhite (2017).

[80] Cf. Lee (2007: 22–30). Who rightly stresses the fact that the fourth-century emperors frequently went to war in person.

[81] Pfeilschifter (2013) offers a rich study of the Roman monarchy resident in the capital Constantinople; Cf. also Diefenbach (2002); Wiemer (2013); Meier (2017, 2019).

[82] Cf. Bell (2016).

protect them: When in the year 400 the officer Gainas, a follower of Stilicho, tried to take control of the court, an uprising of the city's inhabitants led to his downfall.[83] Also important was the fact that the *militia armata* at the Eastern Roman court never became as overpowering as it was in the West. When the general Aspar became too powerful, he was assassinated by order of the Eastern emperor.[84] In the 170 years between 395 and 565, only eight *Augusti* ruled in Constantinople, and not one of them was murdered. Only once did a usurper succeed in being acclaimed emperor in Constantinople, only to be defeated by the previous ruler after a short time.[85] The role played by the metropolis on the Bosporus for the stabilization of imperial rule in the East can hardly be overestimated. Something similar was lacking in the West. In Italy, the emperors had to choose between the heavily fortified harbor city of Ravenna and the vulnerable metropolis of Rome.[86] Both places had disadvantages.

Certainly, the fact that the Eastern Roman government in the fifth century had control over much greater revenues than the West was also helpful, especially because peace with the Sasanians ensured that Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt enjoyed an economic boom.[87] However, in the course of the sixth century, conditions gradually began to deteriorate. Since 540,[88] war with the Sasanians became the rule rather than the exception;[89] along with the Justinianic Plague this worsened the financial position of the empire. At the same time, the military situation in the Balkans deteriorated.[90] But the real incision was made in 602. At that time, the emperor Maurice was killed when mutinous Roman troops invaded Constantinople.[91] For the first time, an emperor residing in Constantinople was overthrown and murdered. Only 8 years later, this was repeated when the emperor Phocas was overthrown by Heraclius.[92] It had become clear that emperors on the Bosporus were now vulnerable. How it had come to this is still unclear. What is certain, however, is that the techniques that had stabilized the empire in the East for so long no longer worked.

[83] Soz. HE 6.6. Cf. Faber (2011).

[84] Marc. Com. ad ann. 471; Mal. 14.40; Evagr. HE 2.16.; Cf. Croke (2005); Stickler (2016).

[85] Cf. PLRE II: 212–214.

[86] Cf. Gillett (2001); Humphries (2012).

[87] Cf. Börm (2016b: 624–633).

[88] In 540, the Sasanians broke the "Eternal Peace" with the Romans, which had been concluded eight years earlier, and plundered Syria; cf. Börm (2006). The loss of face for Justinian was so great that a 22-year war followed. Only in 562 a peace was made. However, in 572 the war broke out again, this time the Romans under Justin II were the aggressors. The fighting lasted until 591.

[89] Cf. Dignas and Winter (2007: 37–49).

[90] Cf. Sarantis (2016).

[91] Theoph. Sim. 8.8.1–8.10.8; Theophan. AM 6095.

[92] Theophan. AM 6102. Cf. Sarris (2011: 243–245).

The consequences were serious. Already the death of Maurice had triggered a civil war in which the Sasanian king, Chusro II, intervened.[93] Persian troops took advantage of the Roman weakness. By 620 they had conquered Northern Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt and were starting to attack Asia Minor.[94] To forestall an uprising in Constantinople, the emperor Heraclius decided to leave the city and lead a guerrilla war against the Sasanians.[95] His stubborn resistance prevented a Persian victory, with Constantinople surviving a siege; but the war did not end until Chusro II, who had failed to defend eastern Iran against Turkish attacks, was himself overthrown.[96]

Heraclius claimed to be the victor over the Persians. [97] But in reality the Roman Empire was running on empty. For years, two-thirds of its territory had been occupied by enemy troops; the coffers were empty. The decision to suspend payments to the Arab *foederati* was therefore understandable.[98] After all, the Persian war was finally over. But when, a little while later, the armies of the first caliphs began their attacks, the position of the Romans was therefore weak. And now the East fared as it was typical for smaller, financially less powerful empires in Late Antiquity: It is no coincidence that the military manuals of that time urged generals to avoid a decisive battle.[99] In 533 Justinian's troops had defeated the Vandals in just two battles;[100] a century later, just two or three major defeats against the Muslims were enough to put an end to the now fragile Roman rule over Syria and Egypt. The emperors simply did not have the resources to start a counter-offensive afterwards.[101]

[93] In 591, Chusro had been able to prevail only with Roman help in a civil war against the usurper Bahram Čobin. Cf. Rubin (2004). In the first years after 603, he therefore claimed to fight for the alleged emperor's son Theodosius, who was also supported by several Roman commanders.

[94] Cf. Greatrex and Lieu (2002: 186–189).

[95] Cf. Sarris (2011: 249–258); Meier (2019: 1027–1035).

[96] After 560, the Göktürks had taken the place of the Hephthalites: Bivar (2004); In the East; Cf. Beckwith (2009: 112;139). Turkish invasions in eastern Iran must have deeply troubled the Persian magnates; cf. Howard-Johnston (2010: 65–67); Potts (2018). Not a few aristocrats are likely to have rejected the royal annexation plans west of the Euphrates anyway, which may have contributed to the fact that the Romans could hold their own in this desperate situation; Cf. Börm (2019). Since Chusro II was apparently not ready to give up his conquests in the West, he was overthrown in 628 and replaced by his son Kavad II, who was ready for peace with Heraclius.

[97] Chron. Pasch. ad ann. 628; Chron. 1234, 100–102.

[98] Theophan. AM 6123.

[99] Veget. 3.26; Mauric. Strat. 8.2.56.

[100] Cf. Leppin (2011: 150–160); Steinacher (2016: 299–308); Heather (2018: 123–146).

[101] In my opinion, many descriptions of the Arab Conquests do not take sufficient account of the fact that in Late Antiquity it was by no means unusual for a war to be decided after only a few battles. The empire of the *rex Romanorum* Syagrius collapsed in 486 after a single major defeat against Clovis; Greg. Tur. 2.27; see Becher (2011: 149–152). Even the most powerful empires did not have sufficient resources to make up for the loss of more than two or three large field armies in the short term. Meanwhile, the civilian population often had little reason (and little chance) to resist. Against this

The fact that the Eastern Roman Empire was still not completely lost was owed on the one hand to the fact that the first *fitna* brought the Romans a respite;[102] on the other hand, the emperors were once again rescued by Constantinople, since the Arabs were unable to conquer the city.[103] In a sense, therefore, the Roman Empire did not end until the Ottomans finally captured the city in 1453 and the last emperor was killed in battle.[104]

It is time for a brief summary. In my opinion, the Roman Empire, mainly because of its economic strength, was superior to all its neighbors; the only exception was the Sasanian Empire,[105] which, however, was usually not strong enough to pose an existential threat. Moreover, the focus of Sasanian foreign policy usually laid on the east of their empire.[106] On the European and African borders of Rome, conquerors were not the problem, but plunderers. Through treaties with 'Barbarian' leaders, through fortifications and through brutal wars of deterrence, the Romans tried for centuries to protect their border provinces.[107] Whenever the imperial troops had their hands free, Germanic warriors were no match for them. There was no enemy far and wide who would have been able to conquer the Roman Empire with its vast resources.

Therefore, I suggest naming the structural instability of the Roman monarchy as the main cause of the disintegration of the Western Empire in the fifth century.[108] As early as the third century, civil wars had weakened the border defenses, and for a couple of years the

backdrop, the success of the Arab invaders can be explained not least by the simple fact that they were luckier than their enemies in a few major battles, the outcome of which had been quite open.

[102] Cf. Howard-Johnston (2010: 481–487).

[103] Cf. Jankowiak (2013). On East Roman survival after Heraclius; see Wickham (2009: 255–278).

[104] Cf. Gregory (2005: 330–339).

[105] The question of how strong the Sasanian Empire was, especially in economic terms, is controversial. Rubin (2008); While assumes a more primitive system, I tend to follow: Howard-Johnston (1995), who stresses the longevity of the empire in a hostile environment.

[106] Cf. Howard-Johnston (2016: 602 f).; Ball (2017); Rezakhani (2017).

[107] First, the *limites* should be watched by the military in order to monitor border traffic and to deter unorganized bands of raiders; in Late Antiquity, the Romans increasingly relied on small, heavily fortified fortresses; Anonym. de reb. bell. 9. Second, Rome threatened its enemies with terror and retaliation. From Augustus to Valentinian II (375–392), imperial armies advanced again and again into the *Barbaricum* and left a path of destruction in their wake. The message was clear: the empire could not effectively defend its long borders against small groups of warriors that plundered their way across the provinces; but retaliation would always be brutal and usually dissuade an entire generation from repeating such a raid. And third, the Romans seem to have begun early to win over contacts across the border, more or less heavily Romanized chiefs and warlords, who sometimes rose to become *reges* and concluded treaties with the emperor; Cf. Geary (2002: 115–120). To these men the emperors could delegate the task of disciplining their booty-hungry tribesmen. This tactic was pursued not only on the Rhine and on the Danube, but also in the Roman dealings with the Arabs; Cf. Fisher (2011). There was a certain risk, however, that as these client rulers increased their power with Roman support, they might come to pose a security threat themselves.

[108] Cf. Börm (2018: 156–165).

Roman Empire was already broken into three parts.[109] Only with great difficulty emperors had been able to stabilize the situation again.[110] In the late fifth century, however, people finally realized that one could do without Western emperors who were unable to preserve the *pax Augusta*. From then on, the leaders of mostly 'Germanic' warrior groups, most of whom had been brought into the empire as mercenaries during the *bella civilia*, provided peace and order in their territories.[111]

Meanwhile, in the East, especially through the establishment of a metropolitan empire,[112] the precarious Roman monarchy was able to provide sufficient stability during most of Late Antiquity. When this system failed around the year 600 for as yet unclear reasons, there followed usurpations and civil wars that first allowed the Sasanians and then the Muslims to conquer the Roman Orient.[113] But ultimately the Byzantine Empire did not go down until Constantinople fell as well.

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[109] Cf. Christ (1995: 663–680).

[110] Cf. Krause (2018: 53–63).

[111] Cf. Sarris (2011: 83–124).

[112] Cf. Meier (2017); Maier (2019). During the fifth and sixth centuries a civilian elite remained influential in the East, men who were insisting on demonstrating their classical education and their *Romanitas*; Cf. Cameron (2009). It was only in the seventh century that a new aristocracy of men who had risen in the army replaced the old *ordo senatorius*.

[113] Cf. Haldon (1997: 41–63).

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The End of the Parthian Arsacid Empire

M. Rahim Shayegan

1 Introduction

The empire of the Arsacids, an Iranian dynasty from Parthia in northeastern Iran that replaced in about 130 BCE the Seleucids, the Hellenistic successors of Alexander on the plateau, was a century-old enemy of Romans, celebrated and feared by its literati and legions, before being toppled by a Persian upstart, Ardaxšahr, who in 224 founded the Sasanian empire.

Treated as the *parent pauvre* of the Iranian empires of antiquity, the Arsacid realm, notwithstanding its longevity and eminence, has been traditionally deemed a loose confederative polity, ruled by a plethora of competing rival kings, whose deeds were as tumultuous as their policies inconsequential, incapable of imposing their will on their subjects, and hopelessly reactive to Roman initiatives. And yet, it lasted half a millennium as the superpower of the Orient. Our views of the Arsacids have sensibly changed in the past decade, owing among others to the systematic publication and use of the late Babylonian

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cuneiform documents, the so-called *Astronomical Diaries*,[1] which, although primarily representing records of celestial movements by residual Babylonian *Tempelgemeinden*, still encompassed frugal historical annals covering almost two centuries of Parthian dominion.[2]

The picture revealed by the Babylonian cuneiform evidence is that of an aggressive and driven Arsacid royal house that systematically expanded and solidified its rule in Mesopotamia, south-western Iran and the Persian Gulf, that is, in Elymais and the Characene, in the span of a few generations. What is more, the examination of Arsacid and Roman relations from their first diplomatic encounter in 96 or 92 BCE, up to the end of the third Mithridatic war in 63, exposes an Arsacid western strategy, which was defined by a cautious, but resolute, expansion of Parthian influence.[3] Arsacid imperialism consisted of an infinitely subtle web of matrimonial alliances and dependencies, intent on maintaining on the empire's (western) boundaries foreign potentates in a state of constraint, who, when called upon, could serve as the agents of (further) expansion, thereby eliminating the empire's need to resort to direct rule. Arsacid indirect rule was therefore not necessarily a sign of the empire's inability to impose its political will, but a major tenet of its strategy—including what we have come to call the hostage and matrimonial policies—which perceived expansionism not merely in terms of conquest, but as the projection of Arsacid influence by dint of clientage and alliances. These new policies, which aimed at instating pro-Parthian (foreign) princes, fostered in Arsacid exile, upon their respective thrones,[4] not only helped them hold sway over Seleucid politics in Syria for some decades, but also, in time, enabled them to maintain Armenia in a state of dependency, and eventually wrest many kingdoms from their powerful potentates.[5] However, Rome's creation of the province of Syria in Asia in 63 and her *de facto* elimination of the defunct Seleucid state brought

[1] See Sachs and Hunger (1988-2014), the excellent anthology of sources for Arsacid history by Hackl et al. (2010), ought to be particularly lauded for rendering the subject more accessible.

[2] For a reconstruction of ealry Arsacid and Seleucid history, see Shayegan (2011). Also the excellent surveys by Hauser (2013), Hauser (2016) (the latter with a focus on state institutions and critical discussion of the numismatic evidence).

[3] On Arsacid and Roman relations during this period, see Shayegan (2011, 311–330); for a more general survey of Arsacid and Roman relations during this period, see the recent comprehensive study by Schlude (2020: 22–59).

[4] For examples of the Arsacid policies, see Shayegan (2011: 141–145, 325–328).

[5] A new case of this policy has come more recently to light with the publication of three new Elymaean inscriptions engraved in pointillé on silver vessels that report on the support the sub-Arsacid ruler of Elymais, Kamnaskires Orodes Phraates received form his Parthian overlord in order to be (re)instated on the Elymaean throne. Below the reproduction of the longest Elymaean inscription, as translated by Sims-Williams (2015):

(§1) 105 staters. King Orodes, son of King Orodes.

(§2) In the month Teshri of year 450 [139 CE], King Kamnaskires Orodes, son of King Orodes brought in all the . . . which [was] in the great high place . . . that it might protect him and intercede upon his behalf for ever.

Parthian aspirations in the West to naught, for as long as Syria had remained subject to incessant Seleucid disputes, it offered sundry opportunities for the Arsacid realm to interfere and cast its shadow over Syria.

Only twice after this period do we witness an attempt by the Arsacid empire to intervene with arms in Syria, by now a well-established Roman province.[6] With both interventions having failed abysmally, we see a return to the hostage policy, wherewith we are well familiar from the early empire, but with a twist. Already during the reign of Augustus, we witness Arsacid state hosts/hostages, making their way to Rome. These were, however, neither solicited as the integral part of a treaty, nor exacted under duress form the Arsacids. These hostages were royal princes sent by the Parthian kings, on the face of it, to allow

(§3) In the month Teshri of year 488 [177 CE], . . . when King Kamnaskires Orodes Phraates came with the Parthians from Media to Elam, into the kingship, then he deposited this cup [so] that all the ... the Parthians ... King Orodes Phraates, taking from them, brought in all that . . ., so that it might intercede upon his behalf and be his protection for ever.

Clealry, the Elymaean ruler, who is mentioned both with his patronymic name Kamnaskires (kbnškbyr/kbnškyr) and the names Orodes-Phraates, followed by the title king (wrwdprḥ [Urūd-Farāh] mlkʾ) is explicitely reported to have come into kingship (ʿl mlkwtʾ) with the help of Parthians (ʿm prtwyh), while coming from Media to Elymais (mn mʾdy b-ʿylʾm). As to the identity of the king instated in the year 177 CE, several possibilties exist. According to Sims-Williams, the first part (§1) of the inscription (altough they are not thus explicitely indicated in the text itself) is written in a different script than the remaining two parts (§2-§3). Assuming that this difference in script also indicates (two) distinct authorships on the silver vessel, than the first part ought to date to the reign of Orodes II, who calls hismself son of another Orodes, presumably Orodes I (wrwd mlkʾ br wrwd mlkʾ, "King Urūd [II], son of King Urūd [I]). The second part (§2), referring to the year 139 CE, might have been written by the same ruler as in (§3), who intended to provide some historical and genealogical perspective. The ruler mentioned in (§2) is a "King Kamnaskires Orodes, son of King Orodes [II]" (kbnškyr wrwd mlkʾ br wrwd mlkʾ). Finally, in (§3), we read the name of the Elymaean sovereign who seized the throne in Elymais in 177 CE with the backing of Parthians. This latter ruler, King Kamnaskires Orodes Phraates, provides no filiation although he most likely followed Kamnaskires Orodes. Thus, the sequence of Elymaean rulers that the silver vessel intimates is as follows: Orodes I; Orodes II (son of Orodes I); Kamnaskires Orodes (son of Orodes II); and Kamnaskires Orodes Phraates; a sequence that is partially different form the one established by Alram (1986: 147–151), Alram (1986: 148–149). On his coingae Phraates, whose legend reads: prʾʾt mlkʾ br wrwd mlkʾ—the legend is likely pure Aramaic—is presented as the son of Urūd, presumably, son of Kamnaskires Orodes. None of the Elymaean kings bearing the name Orodes on these silver vessels, whose affiliation is explicitely recorded, seems to be related to the Orodes on the inscription of Tang-e Sarvak, where a certain Urūd, son of Bēldōšā is mentioned: ṣlmʾ znh zy wrwd nʾsyb kwrsyʾ br bldwšʾ zy rbʾny . . . "this (is) the image of Orodes seizing/assuming the throne (kwrsyʾ), son of Bēldōšā (bldwšʾ), who is my Lord . . ."; on the inscriptions of Tang-e Sarvak, still Henning (1977, 370–381); also more recently Gzella (2008, 112–114). On the silver vessel inscription, see also Salaris (2019).

[6] On Pakāor/Pacorus' excursion, see Dąbrowa (1983: 32–37), Wolski (1989: 643–644), Wolski (1993: 136-140). Also see Nabel (2019) for a recent and fine discussion of the shifting perceptions and strong condemnation, in the (post-)Augustan age, of Roman-Arsacid collaboration during the Roman civil war—which during the Republic was perceived merely as an opportunistic intervention—to which the episode of Pakōr and Labienus jointly campaigning in Syria belonged.

them to be safeguarded from the fray over succession, but in reality, as a means to instill a false sense of comfort in the adversary's mind. Indeed, Rome would have deemed herself able lastingly to impact the destiny of the Arsacid empire, apart from the path of war, if she were to interject her wards into Parthian affairs. However, we know, as probably did the Arsacid kings already then, that from among the princes dispatched to the Arsacid realm to be enthroned upon the express solicitation of Parthian nobiliary factions, not one was ever able to hold on to his ephemeral dignity.[7]

This succinct survey of the contours of the early Arsacid state and its policies towards its formidable Roman enemy, Rome, give us an idea of the type of polity it was. A driven, politically coherent and astute, as well as military capable, realm, that nonetheless could not marshal the inexhaustible resources at Rome's disposal, and instead had to have recourse to the subtleties of soft power, numerous triumphs notwithstanding, to ward off the incessant Roman expansionary thrust.

Another example of the extreme sophistication of Arsacid political thought and policy was keeping the empire's symbolic capital Ctesiphon—one of several *sedes regni*—on the Tigris, the westernmost part of the realm, well aware of the peril such location and proximity to the Roman limes posed. Surely the economic importance of Mesopotamia and its fertile lands, the cultural impact of the Seleucid capital Seleucia in the selfsame location, all played an important role, but much like the practice of surrendering unsolicited hostages to Rome as a token of appeasement to moderate Roman enthusiasm for eastern campaigns, maintaining a capital city on the banks of Tigris, to be occasionally invested, conquered, and looted by Roman emperors, may have fulfilled a similar function, namely, preventing further penetration into the Iranian heartland.[8] It is now against this backdrop that we shall investigate the end of the Arsacids and the possible causes of their demise, all the while being mindful of their willingness to forfeit much ephemerally in the pursuit of lastingly preserving the empire's integrity and the interests of its élites.

2 Collapse, Erosion, or Implosion

Was the late Arsacid empire a polity whose institutions were able to transition into the new realm of the Sasanians following a dynastic change; or was it one whose economy and social cohesion were so severely ravaged on account of internal strife and foreign wars that it imploded, to be eventually replaced by a new polity.

Several factors may speak in favor of a transition prompted by dynastic change, rather than a sudden collapse and subsequent Sasanian renewal. The last great Roman war conducted by the Arsacids, before the rise of the house of the Sasanians, had led to a

[7] On Parthian hostages in Rome, now the pertinent studies by, Nabel (2017a, 2017b), see below for further discussion.

[8] In a forthcoming study, we hope to explore what is being advanced here.

major Parthian victory over Macrinus in 218, which prompted the payment of 200 million *sesterces* of restitution money; and the instatement of a favorable peace treaty between the two empires.[9] But, already in 230, that is, slightly over a decade later, the first Sasanian ruler, Ardaxšahr, who had established his house and consolidated power sometime between 218 and 229 CE, launched his first series of forays into Roman Mesopotamia and Syria, besieging several cities (Nisibis and possibly Carrhae), and ravaging Syria and Cappadocia.[10] In his successful campaigns in Roman territory, which left an impression upon Roman contempories, on account of their boldness and bellicosity, Ardaxšahr appears to have availed himself of the resources of the Arsacid realm, at the very least, of its fighting élites and commanders, experienced in leading armies in foreign terrain and conducting complex operations (including the art of laying siege), to bring to fruition his ambitious westward march.

3 Parthian Presence in Sasanian Garb

That the Parthian nobiliary élites had been absorbed and served in the ranks of the Sasanian army early on, may be inferred from a plethora of sources, among them a number of epigraphic and sigillographic testimonies, which shall be succinctly explored in the following pages. In the inscription of the Sasanian king Narseh at Paikuli, which dates to the early fourth century, the king having just established his rule over Iran after a *coup-d'état*, refers to his domestic constituents who had aided him in his enterprise, as the *Pahlaw ud Pārs*, that is, the empire's two dominant ethno-classes, the "Parthian and Persian people (in arms)," who are then brought into relation with the *Pārsān kār* "the Persian people in arms":

> *ud Pārs ud (Pahlaw)* [*ud any kē*$^{?}$] *Asōrestān pad pāhrag *ānānd ān hanzaman kūnēnd* [*ud*] (*gowēnd*) [*kū*]: [. . .] *Sagān šāh* [. . . *agar*$^{?}$ *ādūg*] *hād Pārsān kār framādan ud* (*šahr*) [*dāštan* . . .].[11]
>
> "And the Persians and (Parthians) [and others who] were at the border watch-post of Asōrestan, those made a council [and] (said) [that]: "[. . .] the king of Sakas [. . . if$^{?}$ he be able] to govern the Persian people in arms and [keep] the (land) [. . .]."

Both of these expressions remind us *mutatis mutandis* of the Old Persian formula used by the Achaemenid king Dareios in his inscription at Bisotun, in the context of the civil war raging in the fifth century BCE, in order to refer to his Medo-Persian partisans, that is, the

[9] Cass. Dio 79.26.2–27.4; Hdn. 4.14.1–15.9. On this episode and the ensuing treaty, see still Ziegler (1964: 133–135).

[10] On Ardaxšahr's Roman wars, see Edwell (2008: 153–169), Mosig-Walburg (2009: 19–31); on Ardaxšahr's rise, see Daryaee (2009: 2–6).

[11] NPi A12,04-A5–6,05.

kāra pārsa utā māda upā mām āha "the Persian and Median people in arms that was with me."[12]

It is striking that in the earliest extant Sasanian inscription—dating to the third year of Šābuhr's reign (ca. 242/243 CE), and reporting on the Roman campaign of Gordianus III against the Persian king—ascribed to a Sasanian high official by the name of Abnūn, the "master of ceremonies in the gynaeceum" (*Abnūn ī pad šabestān ēnēg*),[13] the Roman offensive is presented as an attack on (the) Persia(ns) and Parthia(ns).[14] Indeed, in his private inscription, placed on a fire altar, Abnūn, being informed of the Roman attack, makes the promise to found a fire, if the Sasanian king Šābuhr were to be victorious in war:

> *Pas ka abar* (*s*)*āl III Šābuhr šāhān šāh, ka Hrōmāy abar* Pārs ud Pahlaw *āyēnd, pas an ēdar pad *Wi*(*s*)*p-šād pad jaš*(*n*) *(*ā*)[*n-ān*]. *Pas kū *ašnawēn kū Hrōmāy āyēnd pas an yazdān *pāy*[*w*]*ēhēn kū* [*ag*]*ar* [*Šā*]*buhr ī š*[*āh*]*ān šāh *čēr*[*īhād*]*/*čēr* [*bawād*][15] *Hrōmāyīn zanād u-šān wattar kūnād* [*kū*](−*š*) *pad ban*[*da*]*gīh ēstēnd ēg *nixwārān tā ādur-ēw ēdar nišāyān*.
>
> "Thereafter, in the year 3 of Šābuhr, the king of kings, when the Romans came against Persis and Parthia (or the Persian and Parthian man?), then I was here, at *Wisp-šād,*[16] at *worship. After I heard the Romans were coming, then I implored the gods that if Šābuhr, the king of kings, were to be *victorious, beat the Romans, and vanquish them, so that they were submissive to him, then I would hasten to establish a fire here."

Noteworthy in this passage is the use of *Pārs* and *Pahlaw* as the aim of Roman military efforts. The terms are either to be understood as toponyms referring to the heartlands of the empire's two dominant ethno-classes, "Persis" and "Parthia," or designating the "Persian and Parthian man/men (in arms)," as they frequently do in the later Paikuli inscription as we have seen. In this context, however, one would have expected *Pārs* and *Pahlaw* to be in the oblique plural (with the ending *-ān/-īn*)—if they were to be used as ethnica—for they would have been governed by the preposition *abar* "upon; against," thus, *ka Hrōmāy abar *Pārsān ud *Pahlawān āyēnd* ("when the Romans came against the *Persians and *Parthians"). That the Abnūn inscription differentiated between the rectus and oblique plural forms is well established in the case of *Hrōmāy* < hrwmʾdy> "Romans" (rectus plural), and *Hrōmāyān/Hrōmāyīn* < hlwmʾdyn> "Romans" (oblique plural), which are

[12] DB 2.18–19.

[13] On the Abnūn inscription, see Tavoosi and Frye (1989), Livshits and Nikitin (1991), Gignoux (1991), Skjærvø (1992, 1994), Frye (1993), MacKenzie (1993), Sundermann (1993).

[14] On Gordianus' campaign in 242/243 CE against Šābuhr, also described in the latter's *res gestae* (ŠKZ Pth. 3–4), see Mosig-Walburg (2009: 31–43). Also Edwell (2008: 169–172); and still Kettenhoffen (1983).

[15] The reading **čēr*[*īhād*]*/*čēr* [*bawād*] "may he be *victorious" is a conjecture as only the letters <cl(y)-> may be read before a lacuna of some four to five letters.

[16] On *wisp-šād* "All Happiness" ("Sans-souci"), see Skjærvø (1992: 154); for Achaemenid precedences of the word (as toponym), attested in the Elamite Überlieferung **vispa-šiyātiš* (< Mi-iš-ba-ši-ia-ti-iš), see Skjærvø (1994: 79); also Tavernier (2009: 401, no. 4.3.256).

used correctly in the same paragraph: *Hrōmāy āyēnd* "the Romans came" and [*Šā*]*buhr* . . . *Hrōmāyīn zanād* "were *Šābuhr* to beat the Romans." But, since *Pārs* and *Pahlaw* are not used in the oblique plural, they are either ethnic designations in the singular, referring to the "Persian and Parthian (man)," or represent toponyms; a usage with which we are familiar from the inscription of king Šābuhr I on the Kaʿabe-ye Zardošt at Naqš-e Rostam (ŠKZ), the so-called *res gestae divi Saporis* (third century CE), where, following the king's genealogy, a list of countries and provinces that Šābuhr holds are listed, beginning with Persis and Parthia:

> *ud dārām šahr Pārs Pahlaw Xūzestān Mēšān Asūrestān Nōdšīragān Arabestān Ādurbādagān Armin . . . ud im awand šahr ud šahrδār ud pādgōsbān harw amā pad bāž ud bandagīf awestād ahēnd.*[17]
>
> "And I hold the countries of: Persis, Parthia, Xūzestān, Mēšān, Asūrestān, Nōdšīragān, Arabia, Adurbadagān, Armenia . . . all these many countries and kings and rulers, all (We) have laid under tribute and obedience."

Similarly, when Šābuhr mentions whereto, in *Ērānšahr/Aryānšahr*, he has taken Roman captives to be settled, at the top of his list emerge the provinces of Persis and Parthia:

> *ud mardōhmag čē až Frōmāyān šahr až Anaryān pad āwār wāst andar Aryānšahr andar Pārs Pahlaw Xūzestān Asūrestān ud any šahr ō šahr kū amāh ud pidar ud niyāgān ud hasēnagān dastgerd būd ōδ *nibāst/*nibast.*[18]
>
> "And the people who were from the Roman Empire, (We) led away from *An-Ērān/Anaryān* into *Ērānšahr/Aryānšahr* (into) Persis, Parthia, Xūzestān, Asūrestān, and others, place to place, where Our, (Our) father's, grandfathers' and forebears' foundations were, there (We) settled (them)."

Contrasting a passage of the *res gestae* on Gordianus' campaign with the selfsame events described in the inscription of Abnūn, we may observe that while in the latter account, that is, in the parlance of a provincial mid-level Sasanian functionary, Roman troops advanced on *Pārs ud Pahlaw*, in the official language of the Sasanian empire, the aim of the Roman campaign was *Ērānšahr/Aryānšahr*, hence intimating that, in the understanding of the homo sasanicus in early third century, *Pārs ud Pahlaw*—the two dominant heartlands or ethnoclasses of the empire—were semantically analogous to *Ērānšahr/Aryānšahr* "the empire of Iran(ians)," and could represent the whole of the empire[19]:

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[17] ŠKZ Pth. 1–3.

[18] ŠKZ Pth. 15–16.

[19] See similarly already Sundermann (1993: 204): "The Romans, he [Abnūn] says, 'came over Pārs and Pahlaw (p'lsy AP plswby).' It would be tempting to understand this in its literal sense as the Iranian provinces of Pārs and Parthia . . . it is more likely that in the Barm-e Delak inscription 'Persia and Parthia' replace the official denomination Erān(šahr) of the whole country." Also in the same vein, see Livshits and Nikitin (1991: 43): "'Pars and Parthia' probably was an idiomatic expression used to indicate the Sasanian Empire (Ērānšahr in general)."

*Ud kaδ naxwišt pad šahr aweštād/ištād ahēm *Gordanyōs Kaysar až hamag Frōm Gōt ud Garmān šahr zāwar hangāwišn kerd ud ō Asūrestān abar Aryānšahr ud amah ā[γad] ud pad Asūrestān (m)arz andar (M)išīg paddēmān wazurg zambag būd. Gordanyōs Kaysar ōžad Frōmāyān zāwar *wānād.*[20]

"And when, in the beginning, I ascended (the throne of) the empire, Gordianus, the Caesar, assembled a force from all of Rome, Gothia, and Germania, and came to Asūrestān against the empire of Iran(ians) and Us. And at Asūrestān's frontier, at Mišīg, there was a great frontal battle. Gordianus, ‖ the Caesar, died, the Roman force was destroyed."

Whatever our interpretation of the terms *Pārs* and *Pahlaw* (as ethnicon or toponym) might be, their *twin occurrence* from the beginning of Sasanian rule clearly indicates they were perceived as the two constitutive elements of the Sasanian state, and may suggest that the adoption of the Parthian nobility was a conscious act of imperial continuity in Sasanian garb.

Another sign attesting to the eminence of the Parthian element in Sasanian Persia are specific reports of Parthian nobiliary houses occupying exalted positions within the ranks of the Sasanian imperial aristocracy. Beginning with Šābuhr's *res gestae*, we are informed of Parthian families being held in a place of honor by the king. In the *notitiae dignitatum* of Šābuhr's inscription, the foremost grandees who had served under him and his predecessors are listed. Whereas those serving under Šābuhr's grandfather, a petty king of the province of Persis by the name of Pābag, appear to be Persian aristocrats, those serving under Ardaxšahr, the founder of the empire and Šābuhr's father—*kē abar Ardaxšahr šāhān šāh wxadāwīf būd hēnd* "those who were [of distinction] under the rule of Ardaxšahr, king of kings"—encompassed, following the mention of royal princes and prominent magistrates of the empire (such as the *chiliarch* and the *vice-Roy*), representatives of a number of families belonging to the Parthian high nobility, namely, the *Warāz*, the *Sūrēn*, and the *Kāren*.[21] The presence of these families in the first echelons of the Sasanian imperial nobility is surely indicative of the integration of Parthian élites into the ranks of the Sasanian *Reichsadel* already in the formative years of the Sasanian empire; it may also suggest that the transition of power between one realm to another was more akin to the transfer of power between the Mede and the Teispid polities, rather than a collapse and resurgence.[22]

[20] ŠKZ Pth. 3–4.

[21] On the Inscription of Šābuhr I on the Kaʿabe-ye Zardošt at Naqš-e Rostam (ŠKZ), three members of the house of Kāren are being expressly mentioned: Pērōz Kāren, Gōk Kāren (ŠKZ Pth. 23–24), and Ardaxšahr Kāren (ŠKZ Pth. 26). Members of the house of Sūrēn are also evoked in the ŠKZ: Sāsān Sūrēn (ŠKZ Pth. 23); and Ardaxšahr Sūrēn (ŠKZ Pth. 25); in Narseh's Paikuli inscription: Ardaxšahr Sūrēn (NPi C13,04-C15,04). The Warāz family is represented by: Dēhēn Warāz (ŠKZ Pth. 23); Ardaxšahr Warāz (ŠKZ Pth. 25); and Ōhrmazd ī Warāz (NPi C14,04-C15,04). For Ōhrmazd (ī) Warāz, see also Cereti and Terribili (2014: 362–363, 372) (NPi c5,02; NPi E17.02).

[22] On the position of Cyrus as a powerful magnate vis-à-vis Astyages, see now Brosius (2019: 178–179).

What is more, from the middle period of the Sasanian empire we know of two military offices that attest to the longevity of the Parthian and Persian ethno-classes. Their holders bore the titles of *aspbed ī pahlaw* "chief of the Parthian cavalry" and *aspbed ī pārsīg* "chief of the Persian cavalry," which were attributed to some the four supreme commanders of the empire, the so-called *ērān-spāhbed*s. These generals (whose offices emerged following the reforms attributed to King Husraw I in the mid-sixth century CE),[23] divided the realm in four supra-regional military districts, called *kust*, which *mutatis mutandis* reminds us of the Achaemenid toparchy and the role of the *karanoi*, the supreme commanders over supra-regional military divisions that these toparchies were.[24]

Among the *ērān-spāhbed*s who also carried the title of *aspbed ī pahlaw* or *pārsīg*, we may retain the names of a certain Dād-burz-mihr who, judging from his seal (impression), was the supreme commander of the eastern region (*kust ī xwarāsān*), but also commander of the Parthian cavalry[25]:

> *Dād-burz-mihr ī aspbed ī pahlaw ud huǰadag Ōhrmazd wuzurg* ‖ *ērān kust ī xwarāsān spāhbed* ‖ *abzōn.*
>
> "Dād-burz-mihr, who (is) chief of the Parthian cavalry, and grandee of (King) Ōhrmazd [IV] of good fortune, ‖ general of the eastern region (*kust ī xwarāsān*) of (the empire of) Iran(ians) ‖ Increase."

This Dād-burz-mihr is also known from another, personal, seal, where he is again called *aspbed ī pahlaw*[26]:

> *Dād-burz-mihr ī aspbed ī pahlaw panāh ō Burzēn-mih*[*r*].
>
> "Dād-burz-mihr, who (is) chief of the Parthian cavalry, (and) protector to (the fire) *Burzēn-mihr."*

How exactly the terms *pahlaw* and *pārsīg* are to be understood has been discussed by Rika Gyselen.[27] They are *strictu sensu* modifiers of the head noun *aspbed*, and thus *aspbed ī pahlaw/pārsīg* ought to be read as the "Parthian and Persian chief of cavalry." However, in keeping with other expressions encountered in the inscriptions, such as *Pārsān kār* "the Persian people in arms," one may understand these expressions as "chief of the Parthian/Persian cavalry," although we would have expected in this instance different formulations, such as **aspbed ī pahlawān/pārsān* (or **pahlawān/pārsān aspbed*).

[23] See Gyselen (2001a).

[24] On the *karanos*, see Shayegan (2017: 406–421).

[25] For the official seal of Dād-burz-mihr, see Gyselen (2001b: 453–454), Gyselen (2007a: III:5–7, 252–254); most recently Gyselen (2019: 134–135, 450). On this dossier, see also the excellent study by Pourshariati (2006).

[26] On the private seal of Dād-burz-mihr, see Gyselen (2001b: 454–456), Gyselen (2007a: III:41–47, 284–289), Gyselen (2019: 134–135).

[27] See Gyselen (2001b: 454), Gyselen (2007a: 57–58), Gyselen (2019: 135, 169).

Among other sigillographic testimonies shedding light on the status of the Parthian ethnoclass in the Sasanian empire is the seal impression of another spāhbed, *Friyag/Pīrag,[28] the generalissimo of the southern region (*kust ī nēmrōz*), whose family name, *Mihrān*—yet another of the great Parthian houses ostensibly present in the fabric of the Sasanian state—is mentioned on his official seal[29]:

**Friyag ī šahrwarāz ud huǰadag Husrōy wuzurg ērān kust* [*ī*] ‖ *nēmrōz spāhbed* ‖ *mihrān.*

"*Friyag, the 'Boar of the Empire,' and grandee of (King) Husrōy of good fortune, ‖ general of the southern region (*kust ī nēmrōz*) of (the empire of) Iran(ians) ‖ a Mihrān."

The house of Mihrān is represented by two additional *ērān-spāhbed*s in the sigillographic material, a certain Gorgōn and Sēd-hōš (or *Sē-hōš[?]).[30] They are both spāhbeds of the empire's northern region (*Ērān kust ī Adūrbādagān*), whose family name figures prominently on their offcial seals:

Gōrgōn ī mihrān . . . ud [*hu*]*ǰadag Husrōy* [*wuzurg*] ‖ *ērān kust ī ādurbādagān spāhbed.*[31]

"Gōrgōn of (the house of) Mihrān . . . and grandee of (King) Husrōy of good fortune, ‖ general of the northern region (*kust ī ādurbādagān*) of (the empire of) Iran(ians)."

and:

**Sē-hōš ī mihrān šahr-aspbed ud huǰadag Husrōy w*[*uzurg ērān*] ‖ *kust ī ādurbādagān spāhbed.*[32]

"*Sē-hōš of (the house of) Mihrān, chief of the empire's cavalry, and grandee of (King) Husrōy of good fortune, ‖ general of the northern region (*kust ī nēmrōz*) of (the empire of) Iran(ians)."

[28] The name written <pylky> and rendered as *Pīrag* may just be a variant writing of the Parthian name Friyag/Frīg "the dear one" also attested in ŠKZ Pth. 26, as Friyāg <pry'k> as the name of the satrap of Weh-Andyōk under Šābuhr: *Friyāg Weh-Andyōk-Šābuhr šahrab*. See also Schmitt (2016: 171, nos. 384–385). For the attestations of the name *Pīr(ag)* in Sasanian Iran, see Gignoux (1986: nos. 770–771).

[29] On this, see Gyselen (2007a: 256–259, nos. III/10–12), Gyselen (2019: 270-273, 451).

[30] The first part of the proper name *Sēd-hōš*, spelled <sydhwšy> on the bulla, is attested in Parthian onomastics, see Schmitt (2016: 191, no. 436). And possibly in the Paikuli as *Sēd ī Harawānīg šāyagān* "Sēd of Harēw (Hira), the *šāyagān*," although the meaning remains unclear; see Humbach and Skjærvø (1978–1983: III:2, 124). The derivation of *sēd* <syd> from < **xšaita-* "shiny" (>*šēd* <šyty>), as suggested by Gignoux (1986: no. 835), is unlikeky. A possibility is to read <sydhwšy> as **Sē(y)-hōš* "who has overcome three deaths; one with three lifes?"

[31] See Gyselen (2007a: 272–274, nos. III/27–28), Gyselen (2019: 270–273, 452).

[32] On the seal impression of Sēd-ōš (*Sē-hōš), see Gyselen (2007a: 274–277, nos. III/29–31), Gyselen (2019: 270, 452).

Intriguing in this context is also the title of *Sē-hōš, who, unlike other *aspbed*s in charge of the Parthian or Persian cavalry, is called *šahr-aspbed*, thus raising the question of his status vis-à-vis other *aspbed*s (*ī pārsīg/pahlaw*), that is, whether his was merely a honorific title,[33] or one that was superordinate to the charges held by these *aspbed*s. Aside from the Mihrān family, the house of Kāren is also attested in the sigillographic evidence. On a number of bullae capturing the impressions of personal seals of individuals who may be identified as imperial élites, we find the name of a certain Frahād of the house of Kāren who explicitly identifies as Parthian: *Frahād ī kāren ī pahlaw* "Frahād of the (house of) Kāren, who (is) Parthian."[34] Another bulla bears the pro-patronymic name of another Parthian house in Sasanian service, a certain Pērōz: *farrox Pērōz ī warāz* "the blessed Pērōz of the (house of) Warāz."[35] Although within the extant documentation, imperial grandees referring to their Parthian lineage or origin are numerous, it remains a matter of conjecture to what extent high military charges were reserved for members of their houses.[36] What the later sigillographic material of the sixth century CE evinces, supports the impression already conveyed more narrowly by the epigraphic testimonies of the third and fourth century, namely, that members of the Parthian ethnoclass were on an equal footing with Persian élites in upholding the main institutions of the state, an impression we see substantiated in other corpora as well.

Among private seals from the later Sasanian empire, we possess a number of intriguing specimens. One, deposited at the Cabinet des Médailles in Paris (see Fig. 1), belongs to a certain Mihrag, whose identity is unknown to us, although a few important facts may be exacted from the legend and iconography.[37] The fellow has a typical Parthian name,[38] as well as a Parthian (pro-)patronymic *Frahādān* "son of Frahād," or "descendent of Frahād." Thus, he might have belonged to a faction of the Sasanian *Reichsadel* who was of Parthian descent. What renders this seal further intriguing is its origin and iconography; it is a Roman gem depicting a youthful Tiberius.[39] It is commonly regarded to be a fine example

[33] Thus Gyselen (2019: 14–15): "Cependant tous les noms composés avec *Ērān* ou *šahr* ne renvoient pas nécessairement à une administration centrale. Il peut s'agir de titres honorifiques: *šahr-hazāruft* 'hazāruft de l'empire' et *šahr-aspbed* 'aspbed de l'empire' [peuvent être] sans aucun rapport adminstratif avec des institutions territoriales."

[34] See Gyselen (2007a: 67, 308–310, no. 5: IVB/10–13), Gyselen (2019: 168–169).

[35] See Gyselen (2007a, 67, 304, no. 8: IVA/17), Gyselen (2019: 168–169).

[36] Similarly Gyselen (2019: 271): "Impossible de savoir si c'est le hasard des trouvailles qui fait que des membres de la famille Mihrān sont attestés comme *Ērān-spāhbed* d'une des quatre directions uniquement sous Husraw Ier, ou si cela correspond à une réalité politique."

[37] On the gem, see already Seyrig (1968), Gignoux (1978: 50, no. 5.13; pl. xvi, no. 5.13), Betti and Gariboldi (2009).

[38] On the name, now conveniently consult Schmitt (2016: 134, no. 289).

[39] On the datation, based on Tiberius' depiction with a myrtle leaf crown associated with his ovation, see Vollenweider and Avisseau-Broustet (2003: no. 80): "Cette proposition est confirmée par la couronne de myrte, insigne de l'ovatio. L'ovatio, petit triomphe, fut décerné à Tibère—et à son frère

of (post-)Augustan imperial ateliers and exquisitely executed.[40] How this gem ended up in the Persian empire in the hand of a Sasanian aristocrat of Parthian extraction we shall seek to elucidate. But it is safe to presume the gem was either offered in the Arsacid period as a gift to, or was appropriated as a result of plunder by, an Arsacid prince or grandee, whose offspring continued to preserve the prized possession well into Sasanian times.[41] Only

Drusus—en 11 avant J.-C., après ses entreprises militaires en Pannonie. C'est donc le jeune homme de 31 ans que dépeindrait cette calcédoine." Although it is possible that the depiction of Tiberius represents him in the aftermath of an *ovatio*, following the successful conlcusion of the Pannonian campaign with Drusus, the date(s) and number(s) of the(se) ovation(s) are debated, from year 11 to 9 BCE; on this Saeger (2005: 214). What is more, the depiction of a young Tiberius does not forcibly indicate the date when the gem was made. It is known that Tiberius is represented youthfully in his portraitures, even during the last decade of his reign; see Pollini (2005: 57): "In all of his portraiture, Tiberius is represented, even in old age, as eternally youthful, in keeping with the ideology of the ideal and noble princeps type established by Augustus." Thus, the question of the datation is twofold: to what juncture of Tiberius' life did the intaglio's portraiture refer; and to what period of his life did it belong, as shall be discussed below.

[40] See already Seyrig (1968: 177): "Une nouvelle gemme, par sa qualité, se place au premier rang des intailles de cet empereur." See also Vollenweider and Avisseau-Broustet (2003: no. 80), who attributes this intaglio to the master engraver at the court of Augustus Diskourides: "Un maître graveur aurait gravé cette intaille, peut-être encore Dioscouride qui, en des traits magistraux, aurait défini la noblesse et l'envergure de Tibère" and further "Si l'on peut certifier que cette intaille provient de l'atelier glyptique de la cour d'Auguste, la destinée du joyau lui-même nous échappe." See also Betti and Gariboldi (2009: 249), who argue that while the hand of Diskourides might have been at work in the treatement of the Tiberius gem, one ought not to preclude the possibility of it being made by a member of Diskourides' atelier, who, being inspired by (an earlier model possibly made by the master), could have executed at a later time a gem exhibiting iconographic features pertaining to the Augustan age: "La minuziosa lavorazione, la cura dei dettagli, l'algida levigatezza delle superfici e la classicistica euritmia delle fattezze hanno indotto ad attribuire il calcedonio di Parigi a Dioscuride, il maestro glittico al servizio di Augusto a cui si deve, tra le moltissime opere a lui attribuite, la celeberrima Gemma Augustea. Così la proposta di vedere nell'opera in esame la 'mano' del maestro non contrasta, a mio vedere, con la possibilità che qualche abile artista della sua cerchia abbia potuto trarre ispirazione da un modello evidentemente dioscurideo, traducendo nell'intaglio modi formali e iconografici del tempo di Augusto." As we shall argue below there is the possibility the gem was designed during the last years of Tiberius' reign, although harking back on to ealier models.

[41] In a letter addressed to Trajan, possibly in the fall 110 BCE, Pliny the Younger (Plin. *Ep.* 10.74.1–3) reports on the intriguing story of a former slave, Callidromus. The latter, as the letter goes, had been sent some years ago by the Dacian king Decibalus to the Arsacid emperor Pakōr to be in his service (*a Decibalo muneri missum Pacoro Parthiae regi*). Having served his Parthian master for many years, Callidromus eventually fled (*pluribusque annis in ministerio eius fuisse deinde fugisse*), taking with him a gem (*gemma*) with the image of Pakōr, which had gone astray by the time he was brought before Pliny, in spite of the latter's effort to locate it: . . . *dum requiro gemmam quam sibi habentem imaginem Pacori et quibus oranatus fuisset substractum indicabat* ". . . while I searched for a gem that he indicated was engraved with the likeness of Pacorus, together with his accoutrements, and which had been taken from him." The episode captured in Pliny's letter, beyond attesting to the prevalence of engraved gems and mobile objets d'art (at least in élite milieus) within

Fig. 1 Chalcedony intaglio depicting a youthful Tiberius adorned with a Middle Persian inscription, added around the portrait, beginning at 5 o'clock. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Monnaies, Médailles et Antiques, inv. n° Seyring.1973.1.516 (Gyselen 20 J 3)

much later, in the third or fourth century of the common era, did a member of the family inscribe on it, in an impeccable epigraphic Middle Persian ductus, his genealogy and expressed therein his Mazdean piety:

<mtrky ZY pl'h't'n wyn whyšty ZY lwšn>.
Mihrag ī Frahādān wēn wahišt ī rōšn.
"O Mihrag, son of Frahād/descendant of Frahād, behold the radiant paradise."

As to the identity of the recipient of this gem forged at the Julio-Claudian court a few speculations may be risked.

Among Parthian hostages of royal extraction at Augustus' court, we are informed of a certain Frahād (Phraates), son of king Frahād IV, on whose behalf a faction of the Arsacid nobility intervened under Tiberius in 35 CE, with the request he be released from Roman exile and allowed to assume the Parthian throne against Artawān (Aratabanos) II.[42] The prince, although permitted by Tiberius to return to the Arsacid empire to seek fortune as counter-king, did not survive the initial journey, and was soon replaced by his son, also a Roman hostage/*hôte*, a certain Prince Tiridates, grandson of King Frahād IV.[43] Tiridates was accompanied in his venture by Tiberius' governor of Syria, Lucius Vitellius, who was tasked to facilitate his accession.[44] In spite of some initial success, the

the Arsacid realm and beyond, reminds us of the capricious causes of their circulation. I am grateful to Jake Nabel for having brought this passage to my attention.

[42] Tac. *Ann*. 6.31.1–32.3; Cass. Dio 58.26.1–4. On this episode, see still Ziegler (1964: 60–64); also Dąbrowa (1983, 1987: 67–68, 1989: 316–17); more recently Nabel (2017a: 108–114). For a succinct overview of Arsacid hostages in Rome, their use and purpose, see Nabel (2017b: 34-38).

[43] Tac. *Ann*. 6.32.2–3.

[44] Tac. *Ann*. 6.32.3–4; 37.1–4.

capture of Ctesiphon, and Artawān's retreat in the upper satrapies,[45] Tiridates was eventually abandoned by his Parthian supporters, foremost among them a certain Sinnaces and his father Abdagaeses,[46] and finally forced to take refuge in Roman

[45] Joseph. *AJ* 18.97. Also Tac. *Ann*. 6.36.4: *in longinqua et contermina Scythiae fugam maturavit spe auxilii quae Hyrcanis Carmaniisque per adfinitatem innexus erat* "he [Artabanus] hastily fled to the remote parts and confines of Scythia in the hope for aid, since he was connected, on account of (matrimonial) alliance, to the Hyrcanians and the Carmanians." The notion that Artawān II had family ties with eastern Iranians, including the Hyrcanians, is further substantiated by another passage of Tacitus (*Ann*. 2.3.1), where it is reported he was raised among the Dahae: *Artabanus Arsacidarum e sanguine apud Dahas adultus excitur* "Artabanus an Arsacid by blood had grown to adulthood among the Dahae." However, this episode's similiarities with the (mytho-epic) narratives on the Sasanian king Kawād—who being challenged by his brother Zāmasp found refuge with the Hephtalites, married their king's daughter, and with their assistance found his way to the throne—and Key Xosrō's cycle in the *Šāhnāme*—according to which he was born and brought up in Tūrān—relativizes the historicity of Artabanos' flight to the Dahae and subsequent return. This was already observed by Marquart (1895: 642): "Aber auch zwischen Artabanos selbst und Kai Xosrau finden sich schlagende Parallelen. Wie Artabanos in der Fremde bei den Dahern aufwächst, wird auch Kai Xosrau nach der Ermordung seines Vaters Sijāwaxš am Hofe des Turaniers Frāsijāt . . . aufgezogen." See also Olbrycht (1998: 142).

[46] Tacitus (*Ann*. 6.37.1–4) identifies two personalities from among the Parthian nobility who acted as the main agents of insurrection against Artawān II and sought to replace him with an Arsacid prince in Roman exile; these were: a certain Sinnaces, and his father Abdus/Abdagaeses. Initially, Tacitus (*Ann*. 6.31.2) introduces Sinnaces as *validissimus auctor* "the most able actor," a man from noted family and with equally important means (*insigni familia ac perinde opibus*). Next to Sinnaces, Tacitus alludes to Abdus, whom he immediately qualifies as a man bereft of virility (*et proximus huic Abdus ademptae virilitatis*). In a subsequent passage, Tacitus (*Ann*. 6.36.2) describes how Sinnacus had enduced his father, a certain Abdagaeses, and other magnates, to defect from Artawān (*Sinnaces . . . patrem Abdagaesen aliosque occultos consilii . . . ad defectionem trahit*). Whereas it is not altogether impossible that, in the episode of Sinnaces' agitation against the Arsacid king, two powerful associates, one being a eunuch called Abdus, and the other Sinnaces' own father, named Abdagaeses, were involved, closer scrutiny, however, makes it less likely.

The name *abdus* (< *abd* "wonderful; marvelous")—whose bearer, right after being introduced by Tacitus (*Ann*. 6.31.2), is conveniently assassinated by dint of poison (*ut Abdum specie amicitiae vocatum ad epulas lento veneno inligaret*; Tac. *Ann*. 6.32.2)—seems to represent a short form of *abdagaeses* (< *abdagaš* "having great contentment"). On *abdagaš*, which also occurs as the name of a fortress commander (*dizbedagān*) in Šābuhr's *res gestae* (ŠKZ Pth. 28), see already Sprengling (1940: 414), Grenet and Boepearachchi (1996: 228), Schmitt (2016: 33, no. 1), who defines it as "wunderbare Freude habend"; on *gaš-* "être content," still Ghilain (1966: 58).

The name is also associated with Indo-Parthian rulers in eastern Iran and northwestern India (Arachosia-Sagestān; and Gandhāra) from mid-first century BCE to the advent of the Sasanians; two rulers with the name of Abdagases are attested on coinage.

Abdagases II, might have ruled in Arachosia-Sagestān sometime in the mid-second century CE; see Alram (1987, 136): "Abdagases II. und Pakares sind m. E. um die Mitte des 2. Jh. n. Chr. anzusetzen"; compare, however, Grenet and Boepearachchi (1996: 225), who suggest the last quarter of the first century as a probable date: "On placera donc le règne d'Abdagases II dans le dernier quart du Ier siècle." Among noteworthy features of Abdagases II's coinage, is the occasional use of Parthian (by applying a variant of the Aramaeo-Parthian script) for legends. On his coinage, see

territory,[47] paving the way for a peace treaty between Tiberius and the resurrected Artawān II in 37 CE, during the negotiations of which, gifts were exchanged between the two sides.[48]

Thus, coming back to the initial object of our inquiry and the peregrination of the Tiberius gem into the Arsacid heartland, a number of possibilities may be contemplated. The gem could have been part of the gift exchanges between Vitellius and Artawān II, when meeting face to face during the peace negotiations of 37 CE,[49] and the intaglio depicting the portrait of the Caesar could indeed have been deemed an appropriate offering

Alram (1986: 246-248, types 1 and 2/4, nos. 1142, 1147), Alram (1987: 136-138, tables 16-17, nos. 147, 161). On his drachm, Alram (1986: 247, no. 1142), Abdgases's name reads ΑΒΔΑΓΑΣΟΥ (gen.), but on the obverse, it occurs in abbreviated form in Aramaic script as <'wd > or < 'bd> for *abd*; see also Brunner 1982. For two more recent gold coins of Abdagases II with legends in Parthian, see Grenet and Boepearachchi (1996: especially 220, 230), fig. 2: *abdagaš* (<'bdgšy>) *šāhān šah*; and Grenet and Boepearachchi (1999: 74): *abdagaš* (<'bdgšy>) *šāhān šah puhr Sānabar šāh* "Abdagaš, king of kings, son of King Sānabar (Sanabares)."

Even in the case of Abdagases I, whose rule belongs possibly to the second half of the first century CE (Grenet and Boepearachchi (1996: 2221, n. 4); Alram (1999: 40)), with legends in Greek on the obverse and Kharoṣṭhī on the reverse, we find next to the full form of the name ΑΒΑΔΑΓΑΣΟΥ (gen.) and *avadagaṣasa* (gen.) (Alram (1986: 247–248, type 2/1–3; nos. 1143–1146)) also abbreviated forms of his name on the obverse ΑΒΑΔΑΚ (Alram (1986, 248–249, type 3–3/5, nos. 1148–54)).

It is thus conceivable that from the beginning we only had two main actors fomenting unrest against Artawān, Abdagaeses and his son Sinnaces; with Abdus "the magnificent," representing a short form for Abdagaeses' name, whose role as the main power behind Tiridates' brief counter-reign—*Abdagaes*[*es*] *qui tum aula et novo rege potiebatur* "Abdagaeses who at that time had become master of the court and the new king" (Tac. *Ann*. 6.43.1); and a*vim in Abdagaesis domo* "power is in the house of Abdagaeses" (Tac. *Ann*. 6.43.3)—is indicated by Tacitus. In his capacity as crown-bestower, Abdagaeses seems to have been referred to by his pro-patronymic name *Surena*, for it was as the representative of the house of Sūrēn that Abdagaeses (*Abdagaš*) was bestowing the crown (Tac. *Ann*. 6.43.3). Thus, it is likely that Abdus, Abdagaeses, and Surena may have represented one and the same person, whose different names might have led Tacitus or his sources to erect secondary personages. On the identity of Abdagaeses with Surena, see Brunner (1982), also Olbrycht (2016a: 25), Olbrycht (2016b: 312). The relationship of this Abdagaeses with the Indo-Parthian ruler Abdagases (Abdagaš) II is not clearly established, with some assuming family links: "He [Abdagases II] might conceivably have been a grandson or other relation to Tacitus' Abdagaeses"; Brunner (1982). On the important role (but also the limitations) of the house of Sūrēn in the coronation of the Arsacid king, see the perceptive remarks of Hauser (2005: 189–192, especially page 191): "Im Gegenteil führte der Einfluß der Surenfamilie, die sich an die Spitze des Sturzversuches von 35 n. Chr. gesetzt hatte, auf den Thronprätendenten dazu, daß die Satrapen der wichtigsten Satrapien des Reiches sich wieder Artabanos II. zuwandten." On the "Tiridates narrative," see the analysis of Nabel (2017a: 108–114, 2017b: 34–38).

[47] Tac. *Ann*. 6.44; Cass. Dio 58.26.3.

[48] Joseph. *AJ* 18.103, mentions Artawān sending his son Dareios as hostage to Tiberius, together with numerous gifts (μετὰ πολλῶν δῶρων). Also Ziegler (1964: 62–63), with discussion.

[49] Already Seyrig (1968: 178): "De nombreux cadeaux furent échangés à cette occasion, et l'on peut être assuré qu'il en avait été de même lors du traité de 18–19. Dans l'un et dans l'autre cas, une gemme de prix, à l'effigie de l'empereur, avait sa place appropriée parmi les présents."

to the Arsacid king of kings for the occasion (albeit one still wonders why a youthful portrait of the elderly emperor was gifted).[50] Or, what is more likely, the Tiberius gem was a parting gift to the young Tiridates, as whose foster-father (*altor*) Tiberius is presented by Tacitus.[51] In such a case, a precious gem capturing the effigy of the foster parent could have been given to Tiridates before, or at some time during, his campaign. What makes this suggestion worthy of consideration is the Middle Persian inscription, which as we recall, identifies the gem's later owner as *Mihrag ī Frahādān*. In this context, we may interpret *Frahādān* as a pro-patronymic, alluding to the lineage beyond the immediate father and son

[50] Assuming the gem found its way around 35–37 CE into the Arsacid empire, as a parting gift to Tiridates or at the conclusion of the peace treaty with Artawān II, it is worthwhile to query whether Tiberius' portraiture on the gem (in all appearance wearing a myrtle wreath or the *corona ovalis*), representing the idealized features of a youthful emperor, possibly in the aftermath of the successful Pannonian campaigns, around 11–9 BCE, could have been of bearing on Tiberius' dealing with Arsacid affairs in 35–37 CE, that is, whether reference to this particular historical moment in Tiberius' earlier career was germane to events at the end of his reign. As we know Tiberius' different portraitures represented different episodes of his career. This sentiment is clearly expressed by Boschung (1993: 56), particularly with respect to the variety of Tiberius' bust portraitures already during Augustus' lifetime: "Auffällig ist die Vielfalt der Bildnisfassungen, die noch zu Lebzeiten des Augustus entstanden sein müssen … Darin spiegeln sich die dramatischen Umbrüche im Leben des Tiberius vor seiner Thronbesteigung: sein Aufstieg vom Stiefsohn zum einzigen Schwiegersohn des Kaisers und zum 'Reichsfeldherr,' seine Rehabilitation nach der Rückkehr aus Rhodos, seine Adoption durch Augustus und endlich, nach großen militärischen Erfolgen, sein Aufrücken zum einzigen möglichen Thronfolger." Thus, Analogy with Tiberius' different bust types might possibly shed some light on the composition of the Tiberius gem as well. If the latter's design was inspired by ealier portraitures of Tiberius as commander, then the "military types" portraitures may have provided some Vorlage—that is, Type I "designed to commemorate his first military successes in the East in 20/19 BC as *legatus pro praetore* and his award of *insignia praetoria*"; and type IV "commissioned around AD 10 to commemorate Tiberius' military victories in Illyricum and his being granted a triumph in AD 9 (not actually celebrated until AD 12)"; see Pollini (2008: 152–153). No doubt, past martial prowesses by Tiberius—among others against the Parthians in 20 CE (the recovery of the standars of Carrhae and placing Tiridates on the Armenian throne)—could have thematically informed the design of the Tiberius gem for his final dealings with the Arsacid empire. One may not preclude the possibility of the Tiberius gem being impacted by later portraitures (especially Type VI), wherein the emperor, although still youthful, is nonetless depicted with more mature features, as is the case with our intaglio. His youthful image in busts and on the gem intended possibly to express his vigor against internal and extremal enemies: "I would suggest that this Second Princeps type (Type VI = Chiaramonti type), portraying Tiberius as, in effect, 'rejuvenated,' would have made the point hat he was still full of vim and vigor and fully capable of governing the Empire despite the fact that he was now in his seventies"; see Pollini (2005: 65). On the typology of Tiberius' marble busts, see Boschung (1990), Boschung (1993: 56–58) (for Tiberius' typology), Boschung (2002); as well as Pollini (2008), Pollini (2005), whose typology I have followed in the present study.

[51] The parting words of Lucius Vitellius to Tiridates, when finally in the company of his Parthian partisans, was to remember his grandfather Phraates (*Phraates avus*) and his foster-father Caesar (*altor Caesar*); Tac. *Ann*. 6.37.3.

relation,[52] of Mihrag's illustrious ancestor, possibly prince Frahād, and/or king Frahād IV, father and grandfather of Tiridates. What is more, the Tiberius gem, into which a crude hole had been pierced by a later hand, might have been mounted on a wearable piece of jewelry (such as a diadem), to indicate the source of Tiridates' might.[53] Such a diadem could be the selfsame *insignie* placed upon Tiridates' head by Abdagaeses Surena during the former's coronation in Ctesiphon (*Surena patrio more Tiridaten insigni regio evinxit* "Surena according to the custom of the land crowned Tiridates with the regal insignia."[54] Our Mihrag then, likely a member of the Sasanian high aristocracy, would have been a descendant of Tiridates, in whose house the Tiberius gem was kept, acting as a reminder of his royal pedigree, as a scion both of the Frahādids[55] and Tiberius (the foster-father).

The second precious gem—occasionally still referred to as the Hyacinth of (the Duke of) Gotha or the Gothaer Hyazinth (see Fig. 2a)—which we shall succinctly discuss below, is also deposited at the Cabinet des Médailles.[56] It depicts a diademed Iranian sovereign—whose features are not without evoking some similarities with the effigy of the Arsacid king Miθrdāt II on coinage (see Fig. 2b)[57]—who likely belonged to the Sasanian era.

[52] For the the term Propatronymikon, see Schmitt (1972: 337–39, 2000: 20–21).

[53] So already Seyrig (1968: 177), who, however, attributes this arrangement to Mihrag himself: "Le dispositif de fixation de la gemme, au moyen d'un goujon qui la traversait, remonte sans doute à son remploi par Mihrak, plutôt qu'aux artisans du temps de Tibère: il a pu servir à fixer l'intaille, non sertie, par exemple sur un diadème."

[54] Tac. *Ann*. 6.43.3.

[55] Another reason we deem Mihrag to be a descendent of Tiridates, through whom he inherited the Tiberius gem, is the conscious[?] choice of the pro-patronymic *Frahādān*, which was at the heart of the conflict between the representatives of the Arsacid house of Frahādids (Frahād IV; Prince Frahād; Tiridates) who deemed themselves the only legitimate branch of the dynasty, and Artawān II, who, although most likely an Arsacid—as asserted by Tacitus and Josephos among others: *Artabanus Arsacidarum e sanguine apud Dahas adultus excitur* (Tac. *Ann*. 2.3.1); Παραχρῆμα δ' ἐκάλουν Ἀρτάβανον Μηδίας βασιλεύοντα γένος Ἀρσακίδην (Joseph. *AJ* 18.48)—must have been nonetless an upstart and represented a collateral Arsacid branch before unseating the Frahādids. Thus, the adoption of the pro-patronymic *Frahādān* may indicate that Mihrag was possibly conscious of the more specific confines of his Arsacid identity, to which he chose to refer under Sasanian rule.

[56] On the Hyacinth, see Seyrig and Curiel (1974: 55–59), Gignoux (1978: 30, no. 3.32, and pl. vii, no. 3.32), Gyselen (1993: 45, 56, 104, 20.J.1, and pl. 16, 20.J.1), Gyselen (2007b: 74); and more recently Shayegan (2020–21: 2, 10, n. 16), and fig. 3c.

[57] This similarity and the quality of the gem have led early on some scholars to assume its Hellenistic origin and its attribution to the Parthian age. Already Furtwaengler (1900:2, 245–46, no. 50): "Die Art der Arbeit auf dem stark konvexen Hyazinthe, die prachtvolle Politur der Gravierung, die lebendige Sicherheit und Schönheit der Zeichnung, die Bildung des Auges und die Art der Angabe des Augensternes ist durchaus wie an den guten Arbeiten hellenistischer Zeit. Unter den Münzen hat das Porträt des Arsakes VI, Mithradates I . . . in Haar- und Barttracht sowie im Profile die grösste Ähnlichkeit." Similarly, Martin (1940, no. 2), Plantzos (1999: 177 no. 136), who attributes it to Miθrdāt II.

Fig. 2 (**a** and **b**) The Hyacinth of (the Duke of) Gotha depicting possibly King Narseh (**a**); and obverse of Miθrdāt II's silver tetradrachm—Type: S(ellwood) (1980) 23.3

Fig. 3 Middle Persian inscription on the rim of the Hyacinth of (the Duke of) Gotha. From Gignoux 1978, 1978, pl. vii, no. 3.32

The gem further displays on its rim a Middle Persian inscription (see Fig. 3), in spite of traces of another that reportedly could still be observed, but which now are effaced.[58] The inscription has a ductus often found on Sasanian coins with the tendency to use the letter <y> for <k; d; r> and more, in order to save space. It reads as follows:

<mzdysn bgy šhpw(wyy) (M)R(K)A-n MR(K)A ʾyrʾn W ʾnyrʾn MNW (c)[t](ry) (MN) [. . .]>.
mazdēsn bay šābuhr šāhān šāh ērān ud anērān kē č[*ihr*](*az*) [*yazdān* . . .].
"His Mazdean Majesty Šābuhr, king of kings of Irān and Non-Irān, whose seed is [from the gods . . .]."

This is the extent to which the inscription, as illustrated in Gignoux' *Catalogue*,[59] may be read, and its continuation ([*pus ī mazdesn bay Ardaxšahr šāh ī Ērān*]), which presumably coincides with the broken piece, remains conjectural.[60] The extant legend, however, permits identifying its author as one of the kings called Šābuhr [I–III]. Unlike the Tiberius

[58] Seyrig and Curiel (1974: 55–59), more recently Gyselen (2007b: 74).

[59] Gignoux (1978: 30, no. 3.32; and pl. vii, no. 3.32.). See also Huyse (2006: 189–90), with a slightly different transliteration of a couple of keywords, such as <cytly> instead of <c[t]ry > and < ʾnyl'n> ("mit *lāmed*, nicht *rēš*") instead of <'nyrʾn>.

[60] See Gyselen (2007b: 74).

seal, it is unlikely the gem originated in the Arsacid era, and although it is not perforce of Sasanian making,[61] a number of iconographic specificities suggest ascribing it to the neo-Persians.[62] Especially, Narseh's second, lamellar crown (Type II), which has been reassigned to his second rule and is also depicted on his relief of Naqš-e Rostam,[63] compares to the diadem with lamellae used on the Hyacinth of Gotha.[64] Assuming the gem was manufactured under Warahrān III or more likely Narseh, the question still remains why its iconography was reminiscent of Arsacid rulers of the past, or/and generated by non-Sasanian artisans; and more importantly why it was adopted by a King Šābuhr who inscribed it.

Presuming the treatment of the diadem on the Hyacinth of Gotha permits its ascription to the reigns of Warahrān III or Narseh, the authorship of the inscription ought to be attributed to Šābuhr II, the grandson of Narseh, who put an end to the rule of the Warahrānids (by wresting the diadem from Warahrān III).[65] Šābuhr II's reference to his forebear Narseh (*nab bay Narseh šāhān šāh* "grandson of His Majesty Narseh, King of Kings") may be found in his inscription at Ṭāq-e Bustān,[66] as well as in the fragmentary legend of a royal seal impression attributed to him by Rika Gyselen.[67]

Thus, assuming Narseh was responsible for the commission of the gem, which was later adorned with an inscription by his grandson Šābuhr II,[68] the question would be what purpose a commissioned seal (either by royal, or non-Sasanian ateliers) with an effigy

[61] Gyselen (1993: 56): "un autre sceau qui n'est peut-être pas de facture sassanide, mais qui porte une inscription pehlevie . . ."

[62] See in particular the discussion by Seyrig and Curiel (1974: 55).

[63] Already DeSahzo (1993: 2–3); see also Alram and Gyselen (2012: 280–281), Alram (2008: 28), Weber (2012: 279–281).

[64] Already Erdmann (1951: 98, n. 44): "Eine Kannelierung wie an der Narseh-Krone findet sich schon am Gothaer Hyazinth und an verschiedenen Kūshānshāh-Kronen"; also Seyrig and Curiel (1974: 55); and lately Alram and Gyselen (2012: 287): "Über dem Diademreif des bärtigen Profilbildes sind neun bogenförmige Lamellen aufgesetzt, die Anlass gaben, das Stück Narseh bzw. Wahram III. zuzuweisen."

[65] On the Warahrānids, see the excellent study by Gyselen (2010). On Warahrān III, see Weber (2010). On Narseh, see Weber (2012), Weber and Wiesehöfer (2010).

[66] Fort the genealogical passage, see the inscription of Šābuhr II at Ṭāq-e Bustān (ŠTB): *bay Šābuhr šāhān šāh Ērān ud Anērān . . . pus mazdēsn bay Ōhrmazd šāhān šāh Ērān ud Anērān . . . nab bay Narseh šāhān šāh* "His Mazdean Majesty Šābuhr, King of Kings of Ērān and Non-Ērān . . . son of His Mazdean Majesty Ōhrmazd, King of Kings of Ērān and Non-Ērān . . . and grandson of His Majesty Narseh, King of Kings."

[67] See Gyselen (2007b: 74–78; figs. Aa-b). In spite of the fragmentary nature of the impression, one may still clearly distinguish on the photos (page 75) the name and title of the king as *Šābuhr šāhān šāh*, as well as his affiliation as *nab bay Narseh* (*šāhān šāh*).

[68] Gyselen (2007b: 74), referring to Curiel and Seyrig (1974), states that: "il apparaît que l'inscription a été ajoutée ultérieurement en effaçant l'inscription initiale que portait ce sceau. Il est donc peu probable que le portrait soit celui du roi qui a fait graver l'inscription."

denoting idealized Parthian features served. We are well aware that Narseh, in his attempt to foment a coup-d'état against his nephew Warahrān III, had relied greatly on the support of the Parthian nobility, which he time and again mentions in his Paikuli inscription, most strikingly in a passage, where he refers to his foremost partisans who urged him to seize the reins of power as *Pārs ud Pahlaw kē-n xānag bandag mahist* (*ud pa*)*hlōm ud tōhmīgdom* **ānānd* "Persians and Parthians, who were the greatest and the best and the noblest subjects in our household"[69]:

> *pas Šābuhr ī hargbed ud Narseh ī wispuhr ī S*[*āsānagān ud Pāb*]*ag ī bidaxš ud Ardaxšahr ī* (*hazārbed*) *ud* (*Raxš*) *ī spāhbed ud Ardaxšahr ī* (*Sūrē*)*n*[70] *ud* (*Ōhrmazd*) *Warāz ud Warahrān* [*dād ī Und*]*īgān xwadāy ud abārīg wispuhr ud wuzurg* [*ud kadag-x*]*wadāy ud āzād* (*ud*) *Pārs ud Pahlaw kē-n xānag bandag mahist* (*ud pa*)*hlōm ud tōhmīgdom* **ānānd pad niyābagīh* [*pand*] *ī yazdān ud amā grift ud frēstag* [*ō a*]*mā frēstēnd.*[71]
>
> "Thereafter, Šābuhr the Hargbed, Narseh the Prince, son of Sāsān, Pābag the Bidaxš, Ardaxšahr the Hazārbed, Raxš the General, Ardaxšahr (Sūrē)n, Ōhrmazd Warāz, (and) Warahrāndād, Lord of Undīgān, and the remaining princes, grandees, (householders), nobles, and Persians and Parthians, who were the greatest and the best and the noblest subjects in our household, as was fitting, took [the advice?] of the gods and Ourselves and sent messengers [to] Us."

Who these greatest (*mahist*), best (*pahlōm*), and noblest (*tōhmīgdom*) Persians and Parthians of the king's household (*xānag*) were, may be conjectured by the names and the titles of the dignitaries together with whom they are mentioned; among them Persian princes and grandees, such as Narseh the Prince (*Narseh ī wispuhr*), Pabag the viceroy (*bidaxš*), but also representatives of two eminent Parthian families: Ardaxšahr Sūrēn (*Ardaxšahr ī Sūrēn*) and Ōhrmazd Warāz (*Ōhrmazd Warāz*); that is, the highest echelons of Persian and Parthian imperial aristocracy that formed the king's *oikos*. Hence, one

[69] See Shayegan (2012: 110, 129). The expression °*-n xānag*, used in this context (that is, *Pārs ud Pahlaw kē-n xānag bandag … *ānānd* "Persians and Parthians, who were … subjects in our household"), reminds us of the Old Persian expression *viθ-* and its varied uses, such as *martiya haya hamataxšatā manā viθiyā avam hubaṛtam abaram*, "the man who exerted himself in my household, him I treated well" (DB 4.65–66); *yadiy kāra Pārsa pāta ahatiy hayā duvaiš*[*t*]*am šiyātiš axšatā hauvciy aurā nirasātiy abiy imām viθam*, "If the Persian people are protected, (then) happiness, which is unsullied, shall come down for the longest time upon this house" (DPe 22–24); for this sentence, see Schmitt (1999a: 34–36). And: *kāra pārsa haya viθāpatiy hacā yadāyā frataram hauv hacāma hamiçiya abava abiy avam vahaẏazdātam ašiyava hauv xšāyaθiya abava pārsaiy* "then, the Persian people in arms, who belonged to my household, from Yadā (Anšān?) and beyond, they rebelled from me and went over to that Vahaẏazdāta; he became king in Persis" (DB 3.26–28).

[70] The recent reading by Cereti and Terribili (2014: 316), NPi a5,06, seems to confirm the reading of *Ardaxšahr Sūrēn*.

[71] NPi B11,01-B16,02.

wonders whether the involvement of Parthian high nobility in the overthrow of Warahrān III and the Warahrānids could have prompted Narseh to commission a gem that would depict him with features reminiscent of a Parthian forebear (possibly in the mold of a portraiture of Miθrdāt II), thereby allowing him to reclaim the Arsacid mantle vis-à-vis his Parthian noblemen, "the greatest and the best and the noblest subjects in our household." The equation of Narseh with an Arsacid forebear for the consumption of the Sasanian imperial aristocracy would have been more successful, if the Sasanian house itself were of Parthian descent.

4 Gondopharid Connections

The history of the Indo-Parthian Gondopharid dynasty that ruled, beginning with the reign of its eponymous founder, Gondophares (to be placed in the first half of the first century),[72] until the rise of the Sasanians in areas intermittently encompassing Sagestān, Arachosia, and Northwest India (Sindh; Gandhāra/ Taxila; and Jammu), has been brought into the orbit of early Sasanian history, owing both to Ardaxšahr's early campaign in eastern Iran (that may have caused the demise of the Indo-Parthian polity),[73] and its possible connection with the house of Sāsān. The use of proper names, such as Sases (*Sasa-sa* in Kharoṣṭhī; ΣΑΣΟΥ [both in gen.]), Adūr-sāsān, and Farn-sāsān on Gondopharid coinage,[74] has led some scholars to presume a link between the eponymous forebear of the Sasanian dynasty, Sāsān, and the Gondopharids, and infer from it (as well as from other circumstantial evidence) on the eastern (Indo-Parthian) origin of the house of Sāsān.[75] Whether the

[72] The datation is based on the interpretation of Gondophares' Takht-e Bāhi inscription, containing reference to two different eras, one (year 26) most likely to the beginning of Gondophares' reign; and the other (year 103), which, on account of the month indicated (first of Vaiśākha), ought to refer to the Vikramāditya Samvat calendar, and hence represents the year 46 CE and the beginning of Gondophares' reign around 20 CE. On the inscription and its date, still Konow (1925: 282, 1929: 62), and Medlycott (1905: 10–17), also Alram (1999: 37–38, 40). For a "Synchronogramm" of Indo-Parthian rulers, on the basis of to their coinage, as well as the geographical repartition of their rule, see Alram (1986: 246, 1987: 130–138), 1999: 37–44) (up to Pakōr); and Grenet and Boepearachchi (1996: 2221, n. 4). See also Fröhlich (2004); for an accessible chronology and historical survey of the Indo-Parthian rulers, see Rezakhani (2017: 30–45).

[73] On Ardaxšahr's eastern campaign against the Indo-Parthians, see Alram (2007: 233–240).

[74] On the coinage attributed to Farn-Sāsān, see Alram (1986: 269–270, nos. 1217–1218). For earlier coin publications, still Drouain (1895), de la Fuÿe (1925). For a more recent interpretation of the legends, see Nikitin (1994), Alram (2007).

[75] See more recently Olbrycht (2016a: 3–32). The author presumes that Sāsān, the forebear of the neo-Persian dyansty, was an Indo-Parthian, Gondopharid prince, who married into the Persid royal family and was hence the father of Ardaxšahr I (who for political reasons surpressed his Parthian, Gondopharid lineage): "The key figure in the history of the downfall of the Arsacids was Sāsān, an Indo-Parthian prince who married a Persian princess, who then gave birth to Ardashir I," Olbrycht (2016a: 30); and "Sāsān was in fact a member of the Arsacid Gondopharid line, the ruling dynasty of

Fig. 4 (**a**) Copper coin of Farn-Sāsān at the British Museum (BM Nr: 1929,0609.2) (See: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1929-0609-2). (**b** and **c**) Legends on the reverse: Left (**b**)—Right (**c**)

name Sāsān is a patronymic in *-ān* of the name **Sās* (Sases), who would be the forbear of the later Indo-Parthian rulers Adūr-sāsān and Farn-sāsān, as well as the Sasanians, is impossible to determine. For one, Sāsān as a theophoric name is well attested in Arsacid onomastica (and must not perforce be associated with the Indo-Parthian Sases), and moreover, the reading of the names Farn-sāsān and Adūr-sāsān on the coinage of the former, which was undertaken by Nikitin, is far from certain and requires additional evidence.[76] Quality images of copper coins (12 in toto) ascribed to Farn-Sāsān in the Indo-Parthian collection of the British Museum reveal some faint traces of personal names, but these are still a far cry from the copious legends wrested form the coins by Nikitin. On the reverse of one the better preserved coins, one may detect the personal names <(p)-rnssn> **farn-sāsān*—beginning at 11 o'clock (see Fig. 4a and b)—and possibly <. . .]rs

Indo-Parthia, who reigned in Afghanistan and the north-western regions of India. Even under Farn-Sāsān they held Sakastan, Arachosia and probably part of Sind," Olbrycht (2016a: 31). Since the Gondopharids were Arsacids, who descended from, or were aligned with, the line of Sinatruces (against the younger line established by Artawān II), Ardaxšahr could secure the support of a number of great Parthian families, inlcuding the Sūrēn, who were traditionally allied with the Sinatrucid line. Although there is much merit in assuming a Parthian origin for the Sasanians, were it only to explain the seemingly smooth embrace of the Sasanian cause by Parthian noble houses and their continued presence in the realm, it is also clear that, at the present stage of our knowledge, making the Indo-Parthians (Sases or Farn-Sāsān) the forebears of the Sasanian dyansty is more akin to an act of imagination, rather than historical reconstruction. The possibility that the house of Sūrēn, on account of the role played by Abdagaeses Surena in the conspiracy against Artwān II, had connections with the Gondapharid line, ought to be seriously envisaged.

[76]Nikitin's reading is based on the evidence of some fourteen coins already published by Drouin (1895), and de la Fuÿe (1925), none of which, however, affords a complete reading of the legends. These are composite reconstruction based on the totality of the epigraphic evidence available to him; Nikitin (1994: 68), reads the legends as follows: "The legend starts on the reverse, which is most unusual (from 10 o'clock): prnssn BRY 'twrssn—"Farn-Sāsān, son (of) Adur-Sāsān" and continues on the obverse (from 11 o'clock): BRY BRY tyrdty BRY npy s'nbry MLKYN MLK'—"grandson (of) Tiridat, great-grandson (of) Sanabar, King of Kings." See also Alram (2007: 234), who appears to adhere to Nikitin's reading of the legends.

Fig. 5 (**a**) Copper coin of Farn-Sāsān at the British Museum (Museum Number 1857,0813.87) (See: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1857-0813-87). (**b**) Legend on the right side on the obverse

(s)[. . . > [. . .]*r-sās*[*ān*?]—beginning at 5 o'clock (see Fig. 4a and c); on the obverse of yet another coin (Fig. 5a and b), traces of the letters <. . .]ry ML[KYN > [*sanba*]*r*? *šā*[*hān*?] may be discerned at 3 o'clock. In the end, aside from perhaps the name Farn-Sāsān, there is little else that can be verified through these images.

Assuming the last coins of the Gondopharid dynasty are to be attributed to a ruler called Farn-Sāsān, which remains uncertain, yet the use of the name Sāsān does not inevitably create a family link between the Indo-Parthians and the Sasanians, nor does it evince, even taking into account the rule of Sases, a Gondopharid origin for the neo-Persian dynasty. And although the postulation of a Parthian ancestry for the Sasanians is worth pursuing, its origin ought to be sought elsewhere, as the Gondopharid connection is too tentative and conjectural to be conclusive.

In Parthian documents from the eastern Arsacid capital of Nisa dating to the first century BCE, the name of *Sāsān*, which serves as the eponymous designation of the dynasty, is found in sundry theophoric names,[77] such as *Sāsānbaxt* (and *Baxtsāsān*) "given by (god) Sāsān,"[78] *Sāsānbōxt* "redeemed by (god) Sāsān,"[79] *Sāsāndād* "given by Sāsān,"[80] *Mihrsāsān*(*ak*),[81] *Srōš-Sāsānak*,[82] *Wrahrānsāsān*,[83] suggesting that it was the name of a deity worshiped early in Parthia. One may therefore wonder, whether the use of a Parthian

[77] See still Livshits (1977a, b: 93–97), MacKenzie (1999: 2015), (= MacKenzie 1986: 105–115).

[78] Schmitt (2016: 199, no. 460) with older literature, Schmitt (1998: 182, no. C21, 189–190, no. H12).

[79] Schmitt (2016: 199, no. 461), MacKenzie (1999, 2015), Schmitt (1998: 182, no. C22).

[80] Schmitt (2016: 199, no. 462), also MacKenzie (1999, 2015), and Schmitt (1998: 182, no. C23).

[81] Schmitt (2016: 138, nos. 298–299), Schmitt (1999b: 123), MacKenzie (1999, 2015), Schmitt (1998: 188, no. G3).

[82] Schmitt (1998: 188, no. G5, Schmitt 2016: 196, no. 456).

[83] Schmitt (2016: 235–36, no. 570), Livshits (1977a, b: 175, no. 39), MacKenzie (1986: 215), Nikitin (1993/94: 73–74), Schmitt (1998: 188, 1999b: 122, 127).

theophoric name by the early Sasanians of Persis was merely an indication of their acculturation to the dominant Parthian element; or whether the Sasanians were a Parthian noble house that had settled in Persis, in time adapting to the *kolorit* of the Persid culture.

5 The Dārāyānids in Persis

The early rulers of Persis, who are known to us mainly through their coinage and material culture, consist of two groups.[84] The first one, whose rulers bore the title *frataraka*, encompassed five rulers—Ardaxšahr, Wahbarz, Baydād, Wādfradād I, and Wādfradād II.[85] The second group, whose members adopted for the first time after the collapse of the Achaemenid state the title "king" (*šāh*) in Persis, is known to us through numismatic and epigraphic evidence. This group, whose eponymous founder was a certain Dārāyān I, appears to have initiated a new dynastic line.

The title *frataraka* was adopted by Persid dynasts sometime after 220 BCE, under Seleucid rule, as we have argued elsewhere.[86] The full title that occurred on their coinage, and remained *mutatis mutandis* stable during the span of the Fratarakid dynasty as sub-Seleucid rulers in Persis, reads as follows:

<prtrkʾ zy ʾlhyʾ br prs> /*frataraka ī bayān (pus Pārs)*/.
"*frataraka* of the Lords/of (their) Majesties(, son of a Persian) ".[87]

[84] On the *fratarakā* and early rulers of Persis, see still authoritatively Wiesehöfer (1994), Wiesehöfer (1998, 36–37), Wiesehöfer (2007: 37–49); most recently, Wiesehöfer (2011), Wiesehöfer (2013: 720-721); wherein the author proposes a change to the traditional sequence of Persid rulers to Ardaxšahr, Wahbarz, Baydād, Wādfradād I, and Wādfradād II, following the new findings of Hoover (2008: 213–215). For an early dating, compare Curtis (2010: 379–394), who synthesizes the recent findings of Hoover (2008), and Klose and Müseler (2005). Also favoring an early dating of the *fratarakā,* are Hoover (2008: 213–215), Klose (2005: 93–103), Müseler (2005–2006: 75–103), Klose and Müseler (2008: 15–40); the works by Klose and Müseler preceding that of Hoover, still subscribe to the traditional regnal sequence. For an important study, published prior to Hoover's novel sequencing, with a late dating, see Callieri (2007) encompassing a thorough discussion of the archaeological, epigraphic, and literary material, especially, 115–146, for the analysis of the history of the local dynasts of Persis; also Callieri (1998: 25–38), and Callieri (2003: 153–165). For more recent studies, see Engels (2013), Strootman (2017: 194–197), Shayegan (2017: 415–424).

[85] See Skjærvø (1997 [2000]: 93–104).

[86] Shayegan (2011: 179), Shayegan (2017: 416).

[87] On the meaning of the title *frataraka ī bayān*, and an excellent review of prevalent interpretations, see Callieri (2007: 128–132, 145–146). Compare also Panaino (2003: 283), who sees in *bay*(*ān*) a reference to the gods of Persis: "in the expressions *Frataraka ī bayān* 'the governor (for the sake/for the account = in the name) of the Gods' . . . only the ancient gods of Pārs were meant and referred to." Similarly, compare Skjærvø (1997 [2000]: 102–103), who considers the term *bay*(*ān*) either alluded to the gods responsible for the political status of Persid rulers, or to the divine nature of *fratarakā* themselves: "The meaning of prtrkʾ zy ʾlhyʾ may therefore be: 'ahead of/outstanding among gods > those of divine descent > kings' or, conceivably, 'the one (set) ahead (of others) of = by the gods,'

The term *frataraka*[88] "the one ahead (of others); a superior," was the continuation of an Achaemenid administrative title designating a governor subordinate to the satrap, as attested in extant Elephantine documents of the Achaemenid period.[89] The title also occurs in Aramaic documents of late Achaemenid Bactria, among others, in reference to a certain Ahur(a)dāt who is identified as the "foreman; head of workers" of a subsatrapal official called Bagawant (bgwnt ʾhrdt prtrk-h w-dynyʾ "Bagawant, his *fratarak(a)*, and the magistrates (*dayyānayyā*). . ."[90] The use of the term *frataraka* by the petty dynasts of Persis—who would revendicate their Persian ancestry *inter alia* by calling themselves *pus Pārs* "son of a Persian"[91]—was meant to indicate the limits of their sovereignty as vassals to the Seleucids and later Parthian overlords, which could also have translated into their reluctance to assume the royal dignity.

Beginning with Dārāyān I, possibly following the accession of the Arsacid king Frahāt II in early 133 BCE,[92] the title of *šāh* < MLKA> "king" superseded that of the *frataraka* on the coinage of Persid rulers, thus, maybe indicating a dynastic shift,[93] which might have

which would be reminiscent of Darius' claim that 'Ahuramazdā made me king, one king of (= among, over?) many'." See also the remarks of Grenet 2003, in his review of Panaino. More recently, also Shayegan (2017: 415–424).

[88] From < *fra-tara–/fra-θara-* "ahead of"; see Schmitt (2014: 177–178).

[89] On the function of the *frataraka-* in the Achaemenid period, where the title is reported from the garrison of Elephantine, see Briant (2002: 342, 472), Wiesehöfer (1991: 305–309), Tuplin (1987: 125–127).

[90] On the *fratarak(a)* Ahur(a)dāt's, the "foreman," see Naveh and Shaked (2012: A1) [Khalili IA 6], 64–75, in particular pages 68, A1:8, 74; for other attestations of the *fratarak(a)* title as an "overseer," in reference to a certain Azdā-yāp(a), "foreman" of the messenger (*azganda*) Waxš(u)-Wahišt(a) (wḫšwhšt ʾzgndʾ ʾzdyp prtrkh), see Naveh and Shaked (2012: A5) [Khalili IA 3], 104: A5:4.

[91] The expression is reminiscent of the one used by Dareios and Xerxes in their inscriptions: *Pārsa Pārsahạyā puça Ariya Ariyaciça* "Persian, son of a Persian, Aryan, of Aryan stock. See DNa 8–15; DSe 7–14; XPh 7–13; Skjærvø 1997 [2000]: 102.

[92] See Shayegan (2011: 178; table 3: "Dārāyān)".

[93] For Fratrakid coinage, see Alram (1986: 171–186), Wiesehöfer (1994: 103–113), Klose and Müsler (2008: 15–40). Already Alram (1986: 163, 170), Alram (1987: 127–28), had observed (in this followed by much of the schorlaship) that a caesura in Persid coinage had occurred separting the *fratarakā* series from a second series, intiated by the rule of a certain Wādfradād? II (whose name however remains hypothetical, as it is merely attested on a single coin), and continued by a unnnamed successor, and Dārāyān I ("Unter dem Nachfolger des letzten Fratarakā Vādfradād I., Vādfradād II.?, ist jedoch eine deutliche Zäsur in der persidischen Nominalienlandschaft erkennbar"; Alram (1987: 127–128)). The main changes concern the discontinuity of tetradrachm production in favor of drachms, the absence of a ruler name (contested for Wādfradād? II and missing for his successor) and of the *frataraka* title, while many of the iconographic motives of the *fratarakā* series perdured in the second series. The adoption of the drachm as the main silver coin under Wādfradād? II and the unknnown ruler is to be attributed to the beginning of the Parthian dominion, possibly after Miθrdāt I successfully halting Demetrios II's anabasis in the summer of 138 BCE; see also Alram (1987: 128): "Diese Entwicklung ist nun m. E. mit der Eroberung der Persis durch den Partherkönig Mithradates I. in Verbindung zu bringen (um 139) und zeigt damit erstmals arsakidischen Einfluß in der

had already occurred beginning with the rule of Wādfradād II, the predecessor once removed of Dārāyān I. However, as already argued elsewhere, Dārāyān I, not only by virtue of introducing the title *šāh*,[94] but also on account of his serving as the pro-patronymic forebear (*Dārāyānagān*) on the cup of his descendent Ardaxšahr I,[95] ought to be deemed the veritable and eponymous founder of the rulers who follow the *fratarakā* dynasts. Dārāyān I and his successors were thus the representatives of a new dynasty we have come to call the Dārāyānids.[96] Still the question remains who were these Dārāyānids who superseded the *fratarakā* as rulers of Persis by dint of Arsacid patronage—a Parthian house that beginning with the rule of Frahāt II and the defense of Mesopotamia against a second Seleucid anabasis had begun to reshape the political landscape of minor dynasties on the plateau and beyond (among them Elymais, Characene, and Armenia). The new Persid dynasty, whose coinage, as observed by Alram, seamlessly leads into that of the Sasanians ("Mit Ardaxšīr V. (= I.) geht das persidische Münzwesen schließlich nahtlos in die sāsānidische Königsprägung über"[97]) could either have been another Persian house, whom the Arsacids embraced as trusted vassals, or a Parthian nobiliary house, whom the Arsacids supported in order to eclipse the Persid line of the *fratarakā*.

No doubt the emulation on Persid coinage of Parthian iconographical elements, especially beginning with the rule of Dārāyān II, may indicate the political sway held by the Arsacid empire in Persis, and possibly hint at the Parthian origin of the Dārāyānid house, agents of this alignment with Arsacid cultural norms. Notwithstanding the observance of Parthian models, Persid coinage under the Dārāyānids showed individuating typological departures as well, which both continued and metamorphosed Fratarakid practices, such as the introduction on the reverse of the image of an officiating king standing in front of a

Münzprägung der Persis-Dynastie"; for a different (high) chronology and interpretations, see Klose and Müsler (2008: 42): "Für den Verzicht auf Tetradrachmen könnten auch andere Gründe von Bedeutung sein, etwa ein Mangel an Silver"; also Engels (2017: 299–304).

[94] For other differentiating marks of the "kings" of Persis, beginning with Dārāyān I, such as the ductus of the legends on their coinage, see Skjærvø (1997 [2000]: 101–103).

[95] On the cup and its inscription, see Skjærvø (1997 [2000]), Shayegan (2005 [2009]: 169–171), and more recently Sims-Williams (2021), whose main suggestion to read <š't hn > *šād hān* "may I be happy" as <š'thw> *šādox* "happy (cup)" has been adopted here. I read the inscription as follows: <'rthštr MLKA 'h'yn d'rynkn BRE d'ryn MLKA š'thw ZNE YNGDWN zl KSP s-20-20-10 whyhštr BRBYTA NPŠE> *Ardaxšahr šāh *ahīyān Dārāyānagān pus Dārāyān šāh | šādox ēn YNDGWN zarr asēm 50 statēr | Wahīxšahr wispuhr xwēbaš* "(To) King Ardaxšahr, of the former descendants of Dārāyān [I], son of king Dārāyān [II], this *hammered happy-cup in gold-and-silver, of 50 staters (weight) (belongs) | (It) belongs to prince Wahīxšahr." Sims-Williams' (2021, 614-616) interpretation of <'h'yn> as <AHA-yn >—that is, as *AHA, the never before attested emphatic state of the aramaeogram AH(Y) "brother," plus the phonetic complement <-yn> for the oblique plural—to express *brādarīn*, a form that is attested in the Pahlavi psalter as <AHY-tl-yn>, is without merit.

[96] Shayegan (2005 [2009]: 171), also Shayegan (2017: 421-423).

[97] Alram (1987: 130).

slender (Achaemenid inspired) fire-altar,[98] as well as initiated innovations, such as the use of affiliation in the titulature of the king (e.g. *Dārāyān šāh | pus | Wādfradād | šāh* "King Dārāyān, son of King Wādfradād"), and a new ductus to record Middle Persian.[99] The complex iconographic, typological, and linguistic changes of Persid coinage under the Dārāyānids appears to be the reflection of their identity as a Parthian noble house eager to follow Arsacid models, but also keen to preserve their Persid identity (by transforming Fratarakid precedents), which would later translate into Sasanian practices.[100]

6 In Guise of Conclusion

Above, we have put forth a few nuggets suggesting that the rise of the Sasanian empire would not forcibly indicate the decline, collapse, or erosion of the Arsacid empire. Our knowledge of the state of the later Arsacids being extremely limited, and the beginnings of the Sasanian dynasty as petty rulers of Persis being shrouded in mystery, it is a tall order to determine the type of transition we are witnessing from the Arsacid to the Sasanian dynasty. However, a few tentative inferences may be risked:

1. Drawing on early Sasanian epigraphic testimonies, as well as the sigillographic evidence of the middle empire, we may observe the conscious and lasting will of the Sasanians to integrate the Parthian ethnos into the ranks of the imperial élites, all the while accentuating its distinctiveness. A number of expressions found in the Paikuli inscription: *Pārs ud Pahlaw kē-n xānag bandag . . . *ānānd*, "Persians and Parthians, who were . . . subjects in our household," or in that of Abnūn: *ka Hrōmāy abar Pārs ud Pahlaw āyēnd,* "when the Romans came against Persis and Parthia (or against the Persian and Parthian man?)," reflect the exalted status of Parthian élites, who were placed, above all other ethnea, on an equal footing with the Persian ethno-class. This is all the more remarkable as we learn that *Pārs ud Pahlaw* is the equivalent, in Abnūn's account, to *Ērānšahr/Aryānšahr*, in Šābuhr's *res gestae*, thereby implying that these twin constituents alone could have embodied, or been understood to represent, the concept of *Ērānšahr*. An impression that is further supported by their twin involvement with the royal *oikos* (*xānag*), as seen in the Paikuli inscription.
2. To account for the ease with which Arsacid élites embraced the cause of Ardaxšahr, and the prominence the former enjoyed in the new régime, one may be tempted to assume a

[98] See Alram (1987: 129), Klose and Müseler (2008: 48–50), Rezakhani (2013: 774).

[99] See Alram (1987: 129): "Die Legende ist nach parthischem Muster im Karree um das Münzbild angeordnet und nennt neben Namen (*d'ryw*) und Titel (*MLK'*) auch die Filiation (*BRH wtprdt MLK'*) in persischer Schrift, die das Aramäische schrittweise ersetzt."

[100] Alram (1987: 129): "Der alte, bisher stets bewahrte Reverstyp der Fratarakā wird von Darēv II. ebenfalls verändert und wird so zum Prototyp der sasänidischen Münzreverse."

Parthian origin for the Sasanian house. The hypothesis that the Sasanians were a Parthian noble house, which early on acquired a pronounced Persid identity and ruled as the Dārāyānids, a sub-Parthian dynasty—that ousted the Fratarakids—in Persis, is a sensible proposition, although unproven. Whether this acculturated house had its origins in the east, and belonged to the Indo-Parthian dynasty of the Gondopharids, we are not able to determine at the present stage of our knowledge, even though, the proper names of a number Gondopharid dynasts, such as Sases or Farn-Sāsān (if the proper reading of the latter name is indeed substantiated), may suggest such a link.

3. It is unlikely the end of the Arsacid dynasty represented a collapse or erosion. One ought rather to regard the Arsacid *fin d'empire* as a mere dynastic shift within the selfsame imperial expanse. Doing so would explain how the seemingly upstart Sasanians could have gained acceptance among the Arsacid nobility, the relative fluidity with which Parthian élites were absorbed in the Sasanian aristocracy, and how Ardaxšahr could, merely a decade after the Arsacid house had vanished, conduct wide-scale, logistically demanding campaigns deep into Roman territory; all this would be far less daunting to account for.

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The End of the Ērānšahar: The Decline of the Sasanian Empire

Touraj Daryaee

The fall of the Sasanian Empire in the seventh century CE has been mainly explored from the perspective of Islamic historians. This owes to the fact that most of the sources at our disposition are based on early Islamic accounts written in Arabic, specifically the *futuh* literature. We should be mindful, however, that there were structural and political problems which allowed the Muslims to be victorious, and the conquest itself does not explain the larger picture. So, what can one say about the Sasanian Empire's decline and collapse in the seventh CE from an internal perspective? In this essay, I look at some of the issues that caused the Sasanian Empire to lose its strength and stability in the face of the invaders from the south.

In order to understand the structural weaknesses that appeared at the end of the Sasanian Empire, we should briefly view how such a large kingdom was able to maintain itself for more than four centuries, something that was never to be repeated by any other centralized power in the Near East, until the Ottoman Empire. The Sasanian Empire was known as *Ērānšahr* (Kingdom of the Iranians).[1] It was a west Asiatic Empire, bordering on the Indo-Chinese world on its eastern front with the Kushans, Hephthalites,[2] and the Guptas. In the West, the Romano-Byzantine world loomed large with its power reaching into Mesopotamia, beyond the Euphrates.[3] Sasanian military and influence went through the

[1] MacKenzie (1998).

[2] Rezakhani (2017).

[3] Millar (1995).

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Caucasus, in the north, in the sixth and seventh centuries CE, attempting to reach the Black Sea to outflank the Roman Empire.[4] To the south, it reached southern Arabian Peninsula,[5] where, from the sixth century CE, Yemen became a stronghold and a major area of activity vis-à-vis the Romans, and the client kingdom of Axum.[6]

The Persian King of Kings was the carrier of the *Xwarrah*, or Royal Glory,[7] which had been handed down from the ancient past to them. The king demanded allegiance from the nobility and the grandees, who saw themselves as the upper crust of *Ērānšahr* and *Ērānagān*, i.e., Iranians. Gifts, symbols of prestige and privileges, such as tiaras, plates,[8] gold coins and medallions and more importantly titles and cushions and their seating and relative closeness to the King at the court,[9] helped cement their loyalty to the King of *Ērānšahr*. One would assume that the masses were also made aware of the power of the King, not only through the Zoroastrian religion, which propagated the brotherhood of the religion and kingship, but also the presence of the nobility and the priests. Religious communities, i.e., the Jews, Christians, and others, committed themselves to the King and the King's law (*Dād*), so as to be protected within the empire. The Jewish leader, Reš Galut, and the Christian leader, Catholicos, lived close to the King in one of the seven cities of Mada'in (*Šahrīhā*), and had access to court, where they attended celebrations and royal communions. These religious leaders represented their community, protecting them and cementing loyalty with the Persian King and the empire. On the periphery, there were the Armenians, Georgians, Kushano-Sasanians and Arab client kingdoms which were kept in line through marriage alliances and gifts, honors and titles, which were bestowed on them.

After three centuries of the empire's existence and following important reforms made in the sixth century CE by both Kings Kawād I and Khusrow I, the Sasanian Empire found itself reinvigorated and was at the apex of its power. Monetary and military reforms, along with major attention to the landed-gentry, the *dehgāns*, created a new set of power dynamic in the Sasanian Empire.[10] Furthermore, the military reforms cemented loyalties of not one general, but the generals from various regions (*kust*) to the King of Kings and the empire. The increasing inclusion of nomadic tribes, such as the Daylamites and other groups, into the Sasanian military created new alliances. Land and tax reforms brought equity to the farmers and producers, while the lesser nobility became the firm supporters of the King of King, both at war and during peacetime.[11] This imperial control was bolstered by an

[4] Rapp (2014).

[5] Fisher (2015).

[6] Bowersock (2013).

[7] Duchesne Guillemin (1979: 375–386).

[8] Wiesenhofer (2016).

[9] Garsoian (2005).

[10] Taffazzoli (2011).

[11] Rubin (2003).

efficient Bureaucratic system which controlled, taxed and maintained every province and small villages of the empire.[12]

But in matter of a decade, between 626 and 636 CE, the Sasanian Empire started to crumble before the Romans, the Muslims and their clients and completely fell in the two decades that followed. How can one explain this rapid decline, erosion and fall? Much ink was spilt on this very subject, for the Muslim conquest had a wider significance in world history, not only for the Iranian Plateau, but also for Afro-Eurasian history. Let us begin with older studies by Islamic historians, who accepted the narratives of the *futuh* literature produced by the Arab Muslim, a century or two after the events. These texts and those who followed their scenario narrate the conquest of the Eastern possessions of the Roman Empire and the Sasanian Empire as a god-sent miracle, where a few bare-footed Bedouins on their scabby camels were able to bring down two major world empires.[13]

These fantastic stories worked their way into the writings of native Iranian historians, who were under the influence of Islamic political thought or the social narratives of Islam and, at times, tinged with leftist views of the past. People like the Iranian sociologist Ali Shariati, the cleric Morteza Motahari, or Abdol Hossein Zarrinkoub, a professor of literature who wrote the chapter on the Arab conquest for the fourth volume of the *Cambridge History of Iran*, saw in the Sasanians a hollow empire lacking morals and equality; an empire that was ripe for the picking by the poor and the oppressed.[14]

The Islamists' case was made more viable through the Soviet historiography of the twentieth century led by a man named Mazdak, the Soviet star of late antique history, who saw in the fall of the Sasanians an allegory for the class struggles against feudalism. These scholars, in a way, were reading the Soviet revolution into the sixth century Mazdakite revolt, which is said to have brought down the power of the nobility and the noble houses and the confiscation of their property.[15]

Thus, the conclusion was that the Sasanian state being corrupt and its Zoroastrian priests being tyrants, the Iranian people opened the gates of the empire and allowed the Muslims to enter the garden that was *Ērānšahr*. However, soon enough they found out that they had been fooled. They were taken into slavery and considered as second-class citizens.[16] According to this narrative supported by the Islamists and the leftists, it was only with the advent of the Abbasid revolution that Iranians were able to take revenge and put themselves on an equal footing with the Arabs, while new religious and dynastic tensions were arising.

Of course, none of these intellectual proclamations are considered acceptable by contemporary Western scholars of Iran. This teleological fallacy, implying that the

[12] Gyselen (1989, 2011).

[13] Noth (1994).

[14] Daryaee and Rezakhani (2016: 2–3).

[15] Daryaee and Rezakhani (2016: 2).

[16] Best echoed in the poem of Ahmad Shamlu (2003).

Sasanian Empire had fallen, or should have fallen, because of corruption, lacks any real substance. For the generation that read Sasanian and early Islamic histories through the prism of the giants of Soviet history, such as V. Lukonin, Paigulevskaya, Petroshevsky, and Kolesnikov, this view of the past was en vogue. One can argue that in contemporary Iran, these theses ideas are still accepted and propagated among the intelligentsia.[17]

However, Islamic historians in the West, such as Michael Morony,[18] Fred Donner[19] and Hugh Kennedy,[20] have read the Islamic conquest in a very different light. They disqualify much of the *futuh* literature and other narratives of miraculous conquests, attributing Muslim victory to factors, such as the timing of the invasion and the military prowess of the Islamic armies. They demonstrate that the Arab armies and their generals were more organized and better-trained than the Iranian forces. After all, how else could they have defeated the Romans and the Iranians in three successive battles?

The Iranian scholar Mohsen Zakeri suggests that the Sasanian cavalry's (*Aswārīya*) made an agreement made with the Muslim armies during the conquest of Mesopotamia, where they were allowed to keep their status in the new Islamicate Ocumene.[21] Parvaneh Pourshariati argues that an internal discord between the Parthian and Persian nobility and generals led to the fall of the Sasanian Empire, at the very moment when their unity was most needed.[22] More recently, Hugh Kennedy has claimed that Muslim success was due to the developments achieved by Arab-Muslim societies in the seventh century. In this essay, I investigate three issues relating to Sasanian internal affairs that sheds new light onto the economic and ideological decline and erosion of the empire. They include:

1. The resources of the Sasanian Empire
2. The barbarization of the Sasanian army and the Barracks Kings
3. The prestige of the King and the coup

1 The Resources of the Sasanian Empire

In an important article, James Howard-Johnston has given some assessment of the resources of the Roman Empire and that of the Sasanian Empire, comparing the two, in terms of man power, defenses of the frontiers and economic resources.[23] This article, in tandem with that of late Zeev Rubins, which reviews the successes and failures of the

[17] Ognibene and Gariboldi (2004).
[18] Morony (1984).
[19] Donner (1981).
[20] Hugh Kennedy (2008).
[21] Zakeri (1995).
[22] Pourshariati (2008).
[23] Howard-Johnston (1995).

economic reforms of Khusro I in the sixth century,[24] offer an excellent picture of the extent of Sasanian power, which reached its zenith with Khusro II in the early seventh century CE. At its height, the Sasanian army could muster between 50,000 and 60,000 soldiers, not only taking soldiers from the different provinces, but also through the enlisting of men from the noble houses, specifically the landed gentry.[25] The more important problem was the conscription of nomads, perhaps the Kurds (depending on its meaning in late antiquity and in Middle Persian literature), sometimes the Gīls, but most important the Daylamites, according to the *Fārsnāme-ye Ibn Balkhī*. We shall come back to the consequence of such new army formation in the post-Khusro I era. Here, the numbers of enlisted soldiers are important.

While sources such as Ammianus Marcelinus, Procopius and Agathias provide numbers, we cannot be sure of the estimates. However, that is what we must work with to assess the manpower of an Empire which needed human capital. This statement may be justified based on the various accounts of population deportation from Syria, Anatolia and Armenia into the Sasanian Empire, from the time of Shāpur I (240–270 CE) to Khusrow II (590–628 CE). Of course, the sources tend to either exaggerate or round off numbers of captives. At times, individual numbers are mentioned, while at other times family units are mentioned. If we take the relative numbers given in various sources,[26] we can come close to a million people/families having been settled in the Sasanian Empire. No doubt, some of these people or their offspring supplied military force for the Sasanian army. Hence, the numbers provided for the Sasanian military may be closer to truth and reliance.

For example, the estimate at the time of the conflict between Khosrow II and his challenger, the general Wahrām ī Čōbīn, in the late sixth century places the forces of Khosrow at 60,000 and that of Wahrām at 40,000.[27] This is the highest numbers that we find mentioned in any sources regarding Iranian military contingent. But, as Howard-Johnston mentions, some of these forces may be have been sent by Emperor Maurice from its territory, in Armenia. Thus, our estimate of the Sasanian military at its height should be lesser.

The long war between Rome and Iran certainly depleted the numbers in the Sasanian army, and split them into factions. Hence, as Hugh Kennedy suggests, an Arab army of 30,000 men was able to overtake the Sasanian forces in Mesopotamia.[28] While we cannot trust the numbers given at any time within the Muslim *futuh* literature, the Sasanian army could not have been any larger than twice the size of the Arab forces they encountered.[29]

[24] Rubin (2003).

[25] Howard-Johnston (1995: 166–167).

[26] Kettenhofen (2011).

[27] Howard-Johnston (1995: 167).

[28] Hugh Kennedy (2008: 171).

[29] Hugh Kennedy (2008: 171).

The Sasanian army then seems to have been diminished during the 610–626 CE wars with the Roman Empire, the last great war of antiquity.

Economically, Khusro I had reached Arabia,[30] exploiting the copper mines in the north, and the silver mines in the east of Afghanistan. Silver mines were important in these regions as well, and Sasanian control over those areas allowed for the collection of huge amounts of silver used for minting coinage. While there has not been any solid study of coinage production between the time of Khusro I and the last Sasanian King of Kings, Yazdgerd III, Khusrow II's coinage output was the last great minting production in the Iranian world. The sheer number of Sasanian silver coinage, at more mint sites than any other King of Kings, provided the money for raising the army to allow Khusrow II to push all the way to Egypt and the Levant. We simply do not see anything similar in terms of number of soldiers after the fall of Khusrow II. Was it that the economic collapse, after the fall of Khusrow II, depleted the army of its manpower? The question remains as to how the Sasanians were able to pay for their army and the expenditure of their resources after Khusrow II? I would like to suggest that we are certainly privy to an economic decline scenario which was coupled with the chaos that ensued after the death of Khusrow II, the indemnity paid to the Eastern Roman Empire in 628 CE. Although Yazdgerd III was able to mint coins in various provinces,[31] neither he nor anyone before him was able to match the coinage output of Khusrow II.

Another matter to mention is the decline of agriculture and water projects in the late Sasanian period. Archeological evidence suggests neglect in the seventh century, no doubt because of the incessant wars, environmental disasters and plagues. Records indicated that in the Diyala plain in Mesopotamia approximately 1/3 of the settlements were abandoned.[32] This is made clear from the tax records which reflect an almost 50% drop in revenue from the sixth to the seventh century in Mesopotamia[33] and Khūzestān[34] provinces which was the agricultural center of Ērānšahr. Could it be also that farmers were enlisted in the Sasanian army for the last great war of antiquity, leading to a deficit in food production and lowering the proficiency of the Iranian army? This seems plausible. Finally, we should remember that Tabarī mentions that Kawād II, also died from the bubonic plague, which came to be known as the Plague of Shīroē. Syriac sources document the death of hundreds of thousands of people due to the proliferation of infectious diseases, including the bubonic plague which spread from the Eastern Roman Empire to the Sasanian Empire.[35] The loss of manpower further caused a decline in the economy and the stability of the Sasanian Empire, in the sixth and mainly the seventh century CE.

[30] Morony (2001).

[31] Tyler-Smith (2000).

[32] Christensen (1993: 93).

[33] Christensen (1993: 88).

[34] Christensen (1993: 113).

[35] Morony (2008).

2 Barbarization of the Sasanian Army & Barracks Kings

As mentioned before, the Sasanian military was overhauled by Kawād I and his son, Khosrow I, bringing forth the quadripartition of the Sasanian Empire's military leadership. Hence, the office of *Ērān-Spāhbed*, the "General of Iran," was divided among four generals. We possess the seal imprints of these generals attesting to such military innovation militarily.[36] How these generals functioned in the late sixth and early seventh centuries are important in the context of the decline of the Sasanian army, in terms of the unity and command via the central administration of the empire.[37] Most puzzling is the mention of a *Spāhbed*, some seventy years or more after the death of Yazdgerd III, in the eighth century CE, in the northeast![38] Did these Spāhbeds, like the *Aswārīya*, the elite cavalry of the Sasanians, keep their status in the new Islamic Caliphate? This is certainly a possibility in context where self-interest and self-preservation would have been most important (picture. 1).

Another important phenomenon is what one can call the Barbarization of the Sasanian military, with conscripts from nomadic people, whose loyalty did not necessarily lay with the King of Kings, but rather his immediate generals. This is especially important in the case of the Daylamites who became important infantrymen for the army, with their swords, shields and javelins made for mountain warfare. Evidence show that, during reign of Khosrow I, they were deployed in warfare as far as Lazica, no doubt because of their mountaineering warfare skills. According to Theophylact Simocatta (4.4.17, 4.3.1), during the civil war between Khusrow II and Wahrām Chōbīn (590–591 CE), the Daylamites under the ruler of a general Zoarab switched their allegiance from Hormizd IV to the usurper general, Wahrām.[39] This was already a sign that the loyalty of these nomadic tribes was not based on any specific allegiance, but rather self-interest and economic profit.

By looking at mints between 632 and 635 CE, we can see several people with military positions were raised to the status of king and minted coins in their own name. Three of these individuals include Hormizd V, who minted coins for two years (632), in MY, ST, WYHC, AYLAN and WH.[40] Khusrow III (632–635) also minted coins in WYHC and KLM (Kirman), even probably in Marv, further to the south east of the Iranian Plateau. Also, there is probably a Khusrow IV, in DA, GD, APL, and perhaps BBA.[41] What this minting activity tells us is that, only a year before the major battle with the Muslims, at least three different armies had loyalties to their king-generals or what could be called barracks kings, destroying any military cohesion.

[36] Gyselen (2001).
[37] Daryaee (2010).
[38] Weber (2017: 145–147).
[39] Felix (2011).
[40] Gyselen (1997: 66).
[41] Mochiri (1983: 221).

picture. 1 Shows the Spāhbed Bulla, private collection

3 Prestige of the King and the Coup

The first general to challenge the legitimacy of the family of Sāsān was Wahrām Čōbīn from the family of Mehrān, one of the seven noble families of the empire, in 590 CE. We should not see his actions as a restitution of the Parthian prestige, but rather as a contest for rulership, after being insulted by the pervious king, Hormizd. Wahrām did mint a few coins, but Khosrow II, with the aid of Emperor Maurice, was able to defeat the general and bring an end to the mutiny (picture. 2).[42]

Later, the challenge came from a member of his own family, his uncle Wistahm, belonging to the another seven Iranian noble families. He was able to challenge Khosrow II as well until 595 CE, when he was killed. Richard Frye states that the revolts by Wahrām Chōbin and Wistahm reveal the weakness of the military reforms introduced by Khusrow I.[43] But the eventual cracks happened at the end of Khusrow II's rule, when it was decided to remove Khusrow II from power, after Heraclius had destroyed Shīz in 624 CE, the sacred kingly fire-temple in Arazbijān,[44] and the Dastgīrd, the royal residence of Khusrow II. As Deitrich Huff shows, in fact, rebuilding projects in Shīz, i.e., Takht-e Suleyman, did not stop with the Muslim victories.[45] Kawād II, the son of Khusrow II, and his nobility planned the arrest and eventual death of the King of Kings who had allowed a sacrilege in defiling one of the most sacred fire-temple of the empire and had retreated to safety in the face of Roman aggression. Furthermore, all of Kawād's brothers were executed, so the foundations of the house of Sāsān were shaken to the core and any real legitimacy withered away.

[42] Daryaee (2015: 197).

[43] Frye (2018).

[44] Garsoian (1983: 592).

[45] Huff (2008: 1).

picture. 2 Shows the Coinage of Wahrām Chōbīn, private collection

Hence, many generals and distant family members of Sāsān minted coins and deposed the daughters of Khusrow II. The coup against Khusrow II, possibly organized by Heraclius, if we are to accept Sebēos' account,[46] and the Iranian general, Šahrwarāz caused the downfall of the house of Sāsān and its prestige as the legitimate rulers of Ērānšahr. It was a well-known tradition in the empire that since the time of the primordial Kings, specifically Jamšīd (Avestan Yima), Xwarrah could leave from the King, and bring about chaos and destruction of *Ērānšahr*.[47] The murder of the Ardaxšīr III in 630 CE and the three months rule of a general, Šahrwarāz, who had no dynastic relations to the Sasanians, signaled the end of the legitimacy of the Sasanian dynasty. Slogans on coins of Queen Bōrān (631–632 CE), as the restorer (*wīnārdār*) of the house of Sāsān, is telling of the loss of the royal or dynastic Glory (*xwarrah*), which was to accompany the rightful King to rule over *Ērānšahr*.[48] The Xwarrah, the symbol of sovereignty, had passed on from the family of Sāsān and was brought to none.

When the Muslims suddenly appeared in Mesopotamia, the Sasanians, with no support from any Arab clients or knowledge of Arabia, were caught by surprise.[49] In three major skirmishes the Sasanians were defeated, and later with not real organized resistance, the Iranian Plateau laid open to the conquerors. *Spāhbeds* (Generals), *Mobedes* (Zoroastrian priests), and *Ostāndārs* (Governors) of towns negotiated the best they could to survive and continued their life as they had before. The Pahlavi letters from Tabarestān and Qom, dating from 666–888 CE, suggest that these people were successful in continuing and living as before.[50] Only after a century did the memory and prestige of the family of Sāsān resurfaced. Interestingly, it was the Abbasids and the Sh'ubiyya, that is, the Persian bureaucrats and men of letter, who rejuvenated the Sasanian glories of the past, which were adopted by the succeeding Persian dynasties of the early medieval Islamicate world.

[46] Thomson, Howard-Johnston and Greenwood: 40–129.

[47] Gnoli (1999).

[48] Daryaee (1999: 79–80).

[49] Fisher (2011: 185).

[50] Weber (2012).

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The End of the Kushan Empire

Josef Wiesehöfer and Kai Ruffing

1 Preliminary Remarks

„In creating territorial integrity, the use of religion, royal imagery, and an administrative language, the Kushans forged the Hindu-Kush region into a coherent territory. This territory, subsequently ruled by Kushan remnants, Kushano-Sasanians, the Kidarites, Hephthalites, Alkhans, Nezak Shahs, and the Western Türk, continued to preserve aspects of this unitary character. It was, indeed, this very territory that formed the basis of Miirosan/Khurasan, the eastern extreme of the Islamic Caliphate, and the determining source of power in great parts of the medieval Eurasian world."

With these lines, the latest overview of the history and culture of the Kushan Empire, which emphasises imperial structures, concludes its presentation.[1] Although concentrating on the Eastern Iranian-Central Asian centres of the empire—the control of North Indian territories in the succession of the Graeco-Bactrians or Indo-Greeks and the Sakas would have to be added—the quote makes several things clear: Firstly, the importance of the

[1] Rezakhani (2022); Further new summarizing works on the Kushan Empire: Schindel (2015), Benjamin (2018, 176–203, 245–249), Rezakhani (2017a: 46–71, 2017b: 200–203), Morris (2020a: 74–88); See also the monographic study of the Kushan Empire by Mukherjee (1988).

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Kushan Empire in the concert of the great powers of Eurasia—from Rome in the West to China in the East—which is often underestimated in the West; secondly, the political and cultural influence of the Kushans on large areas of Eastern Iran, Central Asia and India, so that their epoch must be an integral part of any presentation of the history and culture not only of Iran, Central Asia and India, but also of the imperial history of Eurasia in pre-Islamic times; thirdly, the political and cultural networking of people and spaces in precisely that period, which must take appropriate account of aspects of globalisation and localism and be as careful as possible to avoid generalisations as well as hasty ethnicist, nationalist or culturalist patterns of explanation of events, developments or conditions; fourthly, it is difficult to underestimate the huge importance of the Kushans for what now is called the 'First Silk Roads Era'. The alleged pivotal role of this empire, which controlled the routes between Iran, Central Asia, Northwest India and China, is best described by Craig Benjamin in his recent monograph on the Eurasian empires where he emphasises that this period could also be named the "Kushan Era".[2]

The quote and previous research also point to the special problems of an empire-comparative study of the Kushan Empire: the extremely difficult source situation, which gives numismatics and archaeology a very special status in the efforts to reconstruct events and circumstances, thus basic historical sciences which, in the absence of detailed contemporary written records, allow great scope for interpretation; the often enough disciplinary view of the history and culture of the Kushan Empire, which actually calls for transdisciplinary and/or collaborative approaches, but which is still sometimes 'characterised' by Indo- or Iranocentrism or an imbalanced focus on Central Asia; the problem of the chronology of the start of eras,[3] the reigns of rulers, and important events; and finally, the definition, identification and development of spheres of power in the face of an unclear terminology. All these problems come together in the attempt to describe the final phase of Kushan rule in more detail, to grasp it—in an empire-centred and comparative way—as a history of transformations, continuities and/or ruptures, and to show the reasons for such developments.

[2] Benjamin (2018: 249).

[3] It makes a big difference, to mention only the two most important scholarly chronological settings, the beginning of the so-called Era of Kanishka 78 A.D. Loeschner (2012a, b); 127 A.D. Falk (2001); or first quarter of the third century Schindel (2009, 2014); and the era of the Kushano-Sasanians ca. 270, Jongeward and Cribb (2015); 300 Schindel (2012, 2015, 2020); or 350 A.D. Göbl (1984), whether Kanishka I was a contemporary of the Parthian kings and Han rulers of the 1st/second century A.D. or of Ardashir I and the Chinese rulers of the time of the Three Kingdoms. And it is significant whether, for example, Ormies, the rebellious brother of the Sasanid Wahram II, can be identified with a Kushano-Sasanian vassal ruler, or whether the end of Kushan rule in Bactria came about not until around the year 300 or even 350 A.D.

2 The Kushan Empire as an Imperial Structure

The territories controlled by the Kushans (at the time of the empire's flowering) extended from present-day southern Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the north to northern and north-eastern India in the south, with original core regions in present-day Afghanistan north and south of the Hindu Kush. At the latest since the beginning of the first century B.C.,[4] rulers from the contexts of an original tribal confederation (the Yüeh-zhi) in Bactria succeeded the Graeco-Bactrian kings, minted their own characteristic coins and, in the course of time, expanded the territory they controlled (first the Kabul valley and Gandhara, probably under Kujula Kadphises,[5] later, under Vima Takto (Soter Megas), the son of Kujula Kadphises and second Kushan ruler, parts of northwest India). Vima Takto's son, Vima II Kadphises, became famous primarily because he established a gold coin currency which, in addition to Bactrian names and titles, also features a Kharoshthi legend. Both of these, like the depiction of Shiva and his bull Nandi on the coin's reverse, point to the growing importance of India in the Kushan Empire (as a region with gold deposits and symbolic traditions that had always been relevant and stabilising for the rule of dynasties). The strategic and economically extremely advantageous location of the empire and the multiculturalism and multilingualism of its inhabitants provided the Kushan rulers with special economic and political room for manoeuvre,[6] which they also knew how to use in a clever way to unify the empire and stabilise their rule. Evidence of this policy are, among other things, Kushan architecture, which took up Indian, (Eastern) Iranian and Central Asian traditions,[7] and the development of an imperial currency as an integrative factor. The latter represented, in coin legends and through the use of Indian (besides Iranian, Greek, Mesopotamian and indigenous Bactrian) images of deities and symbols on the coins the multilingualism and multiculturalism of subject countries and people.[8] The rulers were undoubtedly aware of the quality of images and symbols, which could be used and interpreted differently by the addressees.

On the other hand, it was the attitude of the Kushan kings towards Buddhism which fostered the general role of their empire as a pivot in the trade between the Parthian Empire, Northwestern India (and its harbours which were gateways for the seaborne commerce with Arabia, Eastern Africa and the Roman Empire), Central Asia and China.[9] Evidently, the trade of the Kushans produced considerable wealth, as it is implied by the famous Begram

[4] Discussion in: Hoo and Wiesehöfer (2022).

[5] For the Rabatak-Inscription that gives us the predecessors of Kanishka I, see Sims-Williams (1996, 1998, 2004, 2012: 77–78).

[6] On Afghanistan as a cradle of ancient empires, see Canepa (2020).

[7] For the Kushan monuments in Afghanistan, cf. Ball (2019, *passim*).

[8] For the deities on Kushan coins, see Jongeward and Cribb (2015: 259–301), Sinisi (2017).

[9] But see the critical assessment of Morris (2020b: 685–687) against the more optimistic view of Seland (2013).

treasure.[10] Nevertheless, the Kushans did not act as middlemen in an alleged trade between China on the one side and Rome on the other side.[11] Certainly, due to its geography, the Empire controlled the routes from Bactria into the Parthian Empire,[12] between Sogdia, Bactria and Northwestern India, and across the Hindu Kush to Kashgar, which was the gateway to the northern and the southern route around the Tarim basin. Buddhism spread along these commercial ties between China and Central Asia. At the same time, it fostered trade because the construction of Buddhist monasteries provided an infrastructure for people, animals and goods travelling on the Silk Roads.[13] Nevertheless, it is not impossible to think that Kushan military expeditions spread Buddhism towards China, e.g. when the Kushans campaigned in the Tarim Basin.[14] The flourishing of the Buddhist cults might be connected with the prosperity if not economic growth in the Kushan Empire, which was based on growing urbanisation.[15] Indeed, the role of the urban centres as commercial hubs was emphasized in recent research. Together with improvements in the irrigation system they triggered a greater production of consumer goods in agriculture and in handicrafts, which resulted in a growth of trade, not least through the acquisition of luxury goods.[16]

The Kushan trade with China as well as that with India is best understood against this background, i.e. an urbanisation which led to economic growth with a greater demand and a presumably greater market thickness within the realm of the Kushans. If this is a reliable conclusion, the positive effects of their empire for trade have to be emphasised. Firstly, the very existence of a growing demand for luxury items fostered trade and the import of such goods into the Kushan realm. Secondly, since merchants from the Kushan empire had access to Chinese goods and to goods from India—among them, without any doubt, also

[10] See Coloru (2009: 53), Graf (2018: 473–477), Morris (2020b: 683–685).

[11] Convincingly deconstructed by Morris (2020b: 685–687); Cf. Graf (2018: 448) regarding the Roman Silk Trade; See also Ruffing (2019).

[12] For these routes, see Coloru (2009: 270); On Parthian activities on the Silk Routes see Daryaee (2020); – It has to be emphasized that the Achaemenid Empire and its successor states – among them the Greco-Bactrian kingdom – played an important role for long-distance exchange in Eurasia: Brosseder (2015: 215).

[13] On the term Silk Roads and its problematical character, see Rezakhani (2010), Benjamin (2018: 3–14), Despite all shortcomings the term 'Silk Roads', which allegedly was coined by Ferdinand von Richthofen but see Mertens (2019); does have a distinguished heuristic value. – On the connection between the trade on the Silk Roads and Buddhism, see Liu (1988, 2019), Lam (2013), Neelis (2011); See also Yang (2013: 85) on the relations between the Kushans and the Chinese.

[14] Rezakhani (2017a: 63); On these Kushan expeditions, see Vorderstrasse (2020: 181–191).

[15] Rezakhani (2017a: 65), Lam (2013: 437–440), Morris (2020a: 85–86).

[16] Mukherjee (1988: 369–371), Lam (2013: 442–443); See also Morris (2020b: 680, 688); – Nevertheless, at least the increase of areas dedicated to food production already started in the time of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom: Coloru (2009, 272); – See Mukherjee (1988, 365–368) for epigraphic evidence for relatively wealthy traders in the Kushan Empire; See also ibd. 372–377 for the development of a wealthy upper social stratum in the Kushan Empire which challenged the traditional Indian caste-system and fostered social mobility.

goods exported from the Roman Empire to the harbours of Northwest India—, they supposedly ensured the movements of goods from one region to the other by doing their own business, since the demand on both sides existed. Thus, goods from the Roman Empire might have been used to buy goods offered by Chinese merchants, and goods from China to buy goods in India. Thirdly, the empire might have been able to ensure a kind of security for its merchants, by means of which trade was fostered as well,[17] although the imperial administration evidently did not make any attempt to introduce standardised weights and measures.[18]

Last, but not least, the Kushan Empire disposed of one resource which was highly appreciated in the West: lapislazuli. In antiquity, the only source for lapislazuli were the mines of Badakhshan in the Hindu Kush, especially in the Kokcha Valley at Sar-e Sang.[19] Their importance is not at least illustrated by a deposit of 75 kg of this precious stone which was found at Ai Khanoum, which is situated downstream at the confluence of the Panj River and the Kokcha River.[20] Evidently, the blue stone was an item in demand since earliest times. It was particularly popular in Mesopotamia, where it was imported since c. 3500 BCE.[21] Certainly it was traded to Mesopotamia via Ecbatana in the time of the Neo-Babylonian and Teispid Empires.[22] According to a document written on a skin stone was an object of trade in Hellenistic Bactria,[23] but the type of stone remains unclear.[24] Lapislazuli was part of the Buddhist 'Seven Treasures' and thus of the goods which were traded to India.[25] It is also mentioned in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, which means that it was traded to Roman merchants as well (PME 39). At least in later times the stone also made its way towards the East. The surviving inventories of the Buddhist monasteries of Dunhuang mention lapislazuli among other precious stones of foreign origin.[26] In the Achaemenid Empire its use also had an ideological dimension: Darius I mentions lapislazuli in the Susa foundation charter (DSf § 10),[27] a fact that illustrates its importance for the self-staging of the king. Thus, the Kushan emperors conquered a region which was economically well-off and also disposed of resources which were highly demanded in India

[17] This view was already put forward by Mukherjee (1988: 361); At least, there is evidence that Central Asia and especially the region of Sogdiana was a central point for Eurasian exchange: Brosseder (2015: 272–276); On the Bactrian connections to the North, see Minardi (2018: 134–139).

[18] Mukherjee (1988: 368–369).

[19] Herrmann (1968: 22–27), Morris (2020a: 63).

[20] Morris (2020a: 63).

[21] Herrmann (1968: 29–57, 2019: 187), Moorey (1999: 85–87), Cunliffe (2016: 125–126).

[22] Briant (2002: 386, 739–740).

[23] Clarysse and Thompson (2007: 278–279).

[24] Coloru (2009: 273).

[25] Liu (1988: 92–94).

[26] Hansen (2017: 318).

[27] Cf. de la Vaissière (2005: 18).

and presumably also in the Parthian realm. Given their nomadic origins, successfully waging war was a core issue of Kushan royal self-representation.

Kanishka (I) the Great, the most famous of the rulers of this dynasty, who claimed divine qualities for himself with the title βαγεποορο ("Son of the Gods"),[28] seems to have extended his rule over Eastern Iran, Central Asia and parts of Northwest India considerably: If we can believe his inscriptions and Chinese testimonies, his dominion now encompassed the whole of northern India up to Pataliputra and parts of the Tarim Basin, a success that, by controlling the above-mentioned important trade connections, also paid off economically and opened the way to the East for Buddhism.[29] Although the Buddhist tradition itself identifies him as a promoter of this faith—and culturally as that of the so-called Art of Gandhara, which takes up Buddhist themes and symbols—he nevertheless held on to the idea that religious diversity in the empire was beneficial and stabilising the rule. The minting of coins under Kanishka, including the increased minting of gold coins and the development of a characteristic ruler's iconography (with specific costumes, headgear and *tamghas*[30]), is evidence of the ruler's political successes as well as the empire's religious pluralism: In addition to coins with Buddhist symbols and the figure of Buddha himself, we find on their reverse sides a multitude of deities of different (Indian, Iranian, Greek, even Mesopotamian) origins.[31] One should beware, however, not only of speculations about Kanishka's own religious convictions, but also of ethnicizing religious diversity. What is decisive is not the origin of the ritual actors, but the action itself: "A globalization view, rather than essentializing or prioritizing cultures, argues for a continuum of the universalization and particularization of cultural elements, explaining how localism (as well as globalism . . .) is inherently translocal through the continuous appropriation and recontextualization of cultural elements from transregionally shared cultural repertoires." In this sense, the cultural (and/or religious) diversity in Kanishka's empire was "the result of various local, regional, and transregionally shared cultural expressions which were adopted and (re)imbued with meaning in diverse local social contexts."[32]

As far as the administration of the empire is concerned,[33] besides the main residence of Purushapura (in the valley of Peshawar), where we find Kanishka's famous *stupa,*[34] there were other main places, such as Kapiśa/Begram and Mathura. Similar to the Achaemenid rulers, Kanishka, who reigned for twenty years, also gave eloquent expression

[28] For Kanishka and the Rabatak inscription, see Sims-Williams and Cribb (1996), Cribb (1999), Göbl (1999). For the „self-made deification"of the Kushan (and Kushan religious policy), cf. most recently Falk (2015–2019): „But in the end we can only say that the Kushans presented themselves as gods on earth, but how far they felt 'godly' themselves we will never know" (p. 45).

[29] For the spread of Buddhism, cf. Heirman and Bumbacher (2007), Neelis (2011: 132–144).

[30] For the *tamghas*, see Jongeward and Cribb (2015: 303–306).

[31] Sinisi (2017), Falk (2015–2019).

[32] Hoo and Wiesehöfer (2022).

[33] On the empire's administration, see now Bracey (2020: 115–140).

[34] Loeschner (2012a, b).

(in inscriptions and images) to his efforts to expand and unify the empire and to his concepts of ruler and rule. Expressions of the latter are, for example, the establishment of an era, the emphasis on Bactria (and its "Aryan" language) as the heartland (or preferred language) of the dynasty, and the references to the already emphasised religious and cultural diversity in the empire, which helped to stabilise Kushan rule.[35]

The successes of Kanishka's successors varied greatly: His son and successor Huvishka and the latter's successor Vasudeva, according to the coins, shifted the centre of the empire more to the south (the capital seems to have been Mathura). On the whole, despite a 'currency crisis' (reduction of the standard of weight), the successes of Kanishka and the empire and rule were consolidated.[36] Under Vasudeva's successor Kanishka II, however, the old core region of Bactria and other areas were lost (to the Sasanians), at least according to the chronological *communis opinio*. The Sasanians in turn finally entrusted members of their dynasty (the so-called Kushano-Sasanians) with the rule over Kushanshahr, thus marking the beginning of the end of Kushan rule. The successors of Kanishka II were now referred back to Northern India, where they became more and more dependent on the Gupta rulers.[37] We will come back to this.

3 Borders and Neighbours of the Kushan Empire

Defining the borders of a premodern empire is not as easy as it seems at first sight. Their definition depends not least on how borders are conceptualised in modern research. A further, yet connected problem is which concept(s) ancient empires and their rulers had of their realm and its frontiers, if there were any. Thus, for instance, in Darius I's ideology the Persian Empire merely did not have any borders, since his realm was staged as a universal empire. However, he perfectly knew that in reality his rule was confined to a certain space, at least as far as the delivery of tributes and the obedience of his subjects were concerned.[38] The same is true for the Roman Empire: at the same time, different concepts of its borders were in use, concepts that were shaped by different competing and conflicting views. On an ideological level, as put forward in Roman epics, the empire lacked any borders; it was an *imperium sine fine*. On the level of ancient descriptive geography, however, it was limited by the rivers Rhine, Danube and Euphrates. And, last but not least, there were the geographical concepts of Roman provincial administration.[39] It becomes clear that

[35] Rezakhani (2022); for the „Aryan language"; see Sims-Williams (1996), Sims-Williams (1998); for the Achaemenid ‚model', cf. Wiesehöfer (2021) (with the older literature).

[36] Huvishka: Jongeward and Cribb (2015: 89–133, particularly pp. 89–92), Vasudeva I.: Jongeward and Cribb (2015: 135–147, especially pp. 135–137).

[37] For the late Kushan rulers, cf. Jongeward and Cribb (2015: 149–178, particularly pp. 149–151).

[38] Wiesehöfer (2007).

[39] Ruffing (2020).

conceptualising a border as a line on a map, which clearly separates one polity from another, is an entirely modern view[40] that cannot be used for understanding the borders of ancient empires. Nevertheless, such concepts are still used in modern research which tries to establish the borders of the Kushan Empire by using material evidence or the distribution of Kushan coins as indicators of direct or indirect rule.[41]

Thus, any attempt to define the realm of this empire is highly problematical, all the more so since Kanishka's account of his deeds and his empire in the famous Rabatak inscription is similar to Darius I's staging of his achievements in his royal inscriptions.[42] And there is a further point worth to be considered, i.e. the existence of so-called 'non-state spaces', a concept which goes back to a monograph on the hill people in Southeast Asia.[43] As has recently been rightly emphasised, the applicability of the concepts put forward in this volume to the historical structures and realities of Central Asia and Northern India is highly doubtful.[44] Nevertheless, it can be taken as a hint to pay more attention to spaces that lacked the control of the Kushan empire or to different forms of control over imperial space. That said, it becomes clear that it is impossible to use concepts of modern states (complicated as they are themselves) in order to define the borders of the Kushan Empire in terms of administrative routines. Accordingly, the most recent analysis has summarised the outcome as follows: "There is some evidence of a physical reality of its borders, though no simple dichotomy existed; instead there was likely a patchwork of different administrations, subordinate rulers, and influence."[45] In consequence, as in the case of other empires, there is an ideological spatial concept and an administrative reality that differ from one another.

But ideological concepts of space also play an important role *in politicis*. At least one reason for the fall of the Kushan Empire may have been the Iranian concept of space and the possibility of deriving legitimacy from military bravery in connection with the conquest of spaces. This idea ideologically belonged to Iran, although in the aftermath of Alexander's conquest the Achaemenid Empire's Eastern parts were lost by the Seleucids and became part of the Graeco-Bactrian and/or Indo-Greek empires.[46] The Kushan Empire was the result of the conquest of Bactria by parts of the Yüezhi confederation.[47] Bactria as well as Arachosia and Gandhara had also played a prominent role within the Achaemenids' concept of space, and it had had some influence on religious views of Iran. Interestingly, vast territories of the Kushan Empire had played an important role in the Avestan

[40] Haslinger and van Laak (2018: 21–23).

[41] Vorderstrasse (2020: 170–175).

[42] Rezakhani (2022, 318).

[43] Scott (2009).

[44] Bracey (2020: 142–143).

[45] Bracey (2020: 148).

[46] Morris (2020a: 55–57).

[47] Coloru (2009: 231–235), Benjamin (2018: 181–183), Rezakhani (2017a: 49–54).

construction of the Iranian expanse and were thus seen as an integral part of Iran.[48] Thus, if these regions were crucial for Iranian and Zoroastrian identity and if the claim to rule Iran and military success were central issues for creating dynastic legitimacy for the dynasty which had seized power in the former Arsacid Empire, military expeditions against the Kushan Empire as well as the claim to rule over Kushanshahr (ŠKZ § 3) must have been a logical consequence for the first two Sasanian kings. As has recently been stated, it was indeed crucial for the Sasanids to claim the rule over Eastern Iran and to seize Kushan power.[49] And so they did. Thus, it might have been the imperial logic of the mighty neighbour which led to the dissolution of Kushan power (see below).

4 The End of Kushan Rule in Central Asia and India: An Attempt at Temporal and Spatial Determination

Similar to the debates on the so-called Kanishka era and the territorial description of his empire, the problems of chronology and the identification of the empire's territories determine not least any preoccupation with the end of Kushan rule. Already the answers to the problem of the beginning of the so-called Kushano-Sasanian Era, where, to name only the most important ones, chronological estimates of ca. 270 (Jongeward/Cribb[50]), ca. 300 (Schindel[51]) and ca. 350 A.D. (Göbl[52]) are opposed, divide the scholars. Those theses lead to very different dates of the end of Kushan rule in Eastern Iran and the start of the so-called Kushano-Sasanian coinage. And also, the spatial determination of what the early Sasanians used to call Kushanshahr is disputed.[53] Finally: The analysis or interpretation of coin images and legends as well as a few other testimonies (Cameo of Wahram II,[54] Kushano-Sasanian coins, Early Sasanian rock reliefs, and epigraphic and literary evidence of Sasanid rule in the East) is characterised by a wide range of interpretations and makes it difficult for the authors of this paper to draw generally accepted conclusions.

According to the chronological *communis opinio* the Kushans lost Bactria at the latest during the reign of the second Sasanid ruler Shabuhr (I).[55] The pictorial symbolism of the Rag-i Bibi rock relief from northern Afghanistan, probably commissioned in the 260s and situated on the important north-south route near Baghlan, and the report of the second

[48] Canepa (2020: 47–51).

[49] Rezakhani (2017a: 48–49), Daryaee (2020: 219) implies economic reasons for the Sasanian attack on the Kushan Empire.

[50] Jongeward and Cribb (2015).

[51] Schindel (2015).

[52] Göbl (1984).

[53] Gyselen (2019: 140).

[54] See Shayegan (2020/2021).

[55] But see Rezakhani (2017a: 48).

Sasanian "King of Kings" from Naqsh-i Rustam (ŠKZ = the so-called *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*) are generally interpreted as an expression of this western occupation of Bactria.[56] On the relief Shabuhr presents himself as a ruler, in whose dominion mango trees grow and rhinoceroses are hunted. The ruler, like his royal predecessors just there, is able to tame, order and control the wild, unconquered nature and thus to prove his ability to govern and his qualities as a ruler. However, Shabuhr does not hunt here the typical Iranian game like his Sasanian successors on the silver bowls of the Middle-Sasanian period or the reliefs of the Taq-i Bustan near Kermanshah (lions, bears, wolves, wild boars and cervids), but the royal hunting game of India. He thus presents himself as *khaḍgatrāta* ("rhinoceros' killer") like the Gupta ruler Kumaragupta I from the fifth century A.D. And the figures near Shabuhr are also carefully selected: A Kushan aristocrat (or king) and his companion are evidence of the peaceful cooperation between the new ruler and the new subjects: For the early Sasanids, as the Shabuhr inscription from Naqsh-i Rustam makes clear, *Kušānsahr tā frāz ō Paškabūr ud tā ō Kās, Sugd ud Čāčestān* ("Kushanshahr up to Pushkabur (Peshawar) and to the borders of Kashgar (?), Sogdiana and Chach (Tashkent)"[57]) is an integral part of Ērān/Iran, its inhabitants are "Iranians" (*ērānagān*) like the "King of Kings of Ērān and Non-Ērān" himself.[58]

Soon after, again according to the majority opinion of research, Bactria and probably a little later Gandhara were administered by a branch of the Sasanid house, the so-called Kushano-Sasanians.[59] Their orientation towards the Kushan ideology of rulership and power, not least evident in their titles, and towards the coinage system of their predecessors as well as their appreciation of the Bactrian language has been emphasised often enough. On the other hand, however, it has recently been stressed that, despite the religious and cultural heterogeneity of Bactria still being emphasised in the coin designs, it has at the same time been subordinated to the goal of linking regional rule with the Zoroastrianism-based legitimation of rule of the overlords in the West.[60] This state of affairs did not change until the arrival of the so-called Iranian Huns[61] in the second half of the fourth century, if one disregards the opinion that Kanishka II had once again been able to bring parts of Gandhara (and probably also Kapiśa/Kabulistan) under his control.[62] In contrast, the rule of his successors (probably Vasishka, Kanishka III, Vasudeva II) remained limited to Northern India: Vasishka's four inscriptions, including a Kharoshthi inscription from the Indus

[56] Wiesehöfer (2017), Huyse (1999), Potts (2018: 287–288), Gyselen (2019: 140).

[57] Most probably, the latter three territories were not part of Kushanshahr (Huyse 1999: 2, 36 f.; Gyselen 2019: 140; different view: Grenet and Sims-Williams 1987: 113 n. 50).

[58] Wiesehöfer (2017).

[59] For a summary of the history of this dynasty, see (with partly very different dates and assessments): Jongeward and Cribb (2015: 197–226), Schindel (2015), Rezakhani (2017a: 72–86).

[60] Sinisi (2015).

[61] For the term and its history, cf. Alram (2016).

[62] Jongeward and Cribb (2015: 149).

region,[63] mark this melted imperial territory, even though his (gold) coins, which are based on the designs of Huvishka and Vasudeva I, are reminiscent of the glorious times of Kushan rule.[64] It is the time from Kanishka II onwards, when the coins of the last Kushans change significantly: The gold content of the coins decreases significantly, as does the weight standard of the copper coins. Brahmi monograms increasingly replace the often illegible Bactrian inscriptions as identification markers for kings, just as the importance of Bactrian as an official language seems to be declining in general.[65]

The last Kushan rulers, Mahi, Shaka and Kipunandha, are also mainly known from their coins.[66] They seem to have administered the region around Mathura, probably already under the Guptas (Samudragupta). Their coins, stylistically similar to the coins of the great Guptas, but of reduced value, are evidence of this loss of importance. Kipunandha, whose name appears in the inscription of Samudragupta from Allahabad,[67] was probably replaced at the end of the fourth century in Northern India by the representatives of the so-called Iranian Huns, who also turned the political situation upside down in the original Kushan heartland of Tokharestan: As successors of the Kushano-Sasanians they and their successors became the great opponents of the Sasanids in the East.[68] The fate of the last Kushans in Northern India reminds a little bit of the end of the Maurya dynasty in the late third century B.C., who also sank to the level of smaller *rajas* before they disappeared dynastically-politically from history.

The political fate of the Kushano-Sasanians in Bactria is not supposed to interest us here, since they are not to be regarded as 'relatives' of the Kushan. The questions about the identification of their kings, the beginning and the history of their rule as well as about the relationship to the Sasanid overlords are thus left out. This is also true, for instance, for the fratricidal war between the Sasanid Wahram II and his rebellious brother Ormies, who, as already emphasised, depending on the chronology of the Kushan and the Kushano-Sasanians, is identified by some with the Kushano-Sasanian king Ohrmazd I,[69] while others separate the rebel Ormies and the loyal "high governor" of Kushanshahr Ohrmazd I of the fourth century from each other.[70] In contrast, the heritage of the Kushans in Iran/Central Asia and India is significant: It is reflected in the growing importance of cities such as Balkh, Peshawar, Taxila or Mathura as well as in the name of the original core region

[63] Lüders (1961: 125 f).

[64] Vasishka I: Jongeward and Cribb (2015: 164–168).

[65] The Brahmi monograms later also characterize the coins of the Kidarites in Gandhara and the Gupta in India, while Bactrian dominates the coin legends of the Kushano-Sasanians and later the Kidarites in Eastern Iran and that of the Alkhan (Jongeward and Cribb 2015: 6–8).

[66] Jongeward and Cribb (2015: 174–178).

[67] Jongeward and Cribb (2015: 227).

[68] Alram (2016).

[69] Most recently: Shayegan (2020/2021).

[70] Schindel (2015: 147–149).

Tokharestan or the development of a territorial concept such as Khorasan.[71] The intensified political, economic and cultural networks between the areas north, south and east of the Hindu Kush, which strengthened cultural tendencies of globalisation and localism, did not lose their importance with the territorial displacement of the Kushan rulers from present-day Afghanistan and the final end of the dynasty. And also, the Bactrian language used for administration and representation played an important role until well into the Islamic period, before it was displaced by New Persian. And finally, the Kushans opened the way for the originally North Indian Buddhism via the Hindu Kush to Bactria (and thus Iran) and along the Silk Roads to the East (China), thus allowing the so-called art of Gandhara to spread to large cultural areas. The role of their successors as eastern neighbours of the Sasanians (Kidarites, Hephthalites etc.) is, as has already been emphasised, also unthinkable without the Kushan heritage in self-representation and ruling practice.

5 Disruption or Transformation: The End of Kushan Rule as a Research Problem

The reasons for the end of the Kushan Empire are difficult to determine, due to a loss and lack of sources as well as the problems of spatial, temporal and personal allocation of individual testimonies (not least of the coins). In any case, it is certain that (a) the end of the rule of this dynasty came at different times in different regions. Members of the dynasty determined the fate of Northern India for longer than that of Bactria or Gandhara; (b) it is also certain that, at least according to the generally accepted chronology (eras of 117/127 or ca. 270 A.D.), the empire-building efforts of the Sasanians and Guptas in the West and East with their respective expansionist efforts were an important factor in this end; as it may be stated, by the way, that the period of Kushan empire-building and consolidation as well as the expansion of their rule, not least under the kings mentioned in the Rabatak inscription of Kanishka, was also decisively influenced by the political conditions in the West and East, e.g. Parthian-Roman antagonism and the weakness of the Arsacid Empire in the first half of the second century A.D. The expansions of the Sasanians and Guptas had (c) not only political but also economic consequences for the former rulers of Eastern Iran/Central Asia and Northern India: Economically important revenues from agriculture and urban contexts (taxes etc.) were lost, profits from regional and supra-regional trade (customs, duties etc.) broke away, as well as infrastructural connections in general declined. In the course of history, such losses of income have always had political and military consequences, ranging from the dissatisfaction of the economically and/or socially oppressed subjects—the Kushans had not been the original masters of Northern India—to the difficulties in financing military ventures to reclaim or secure territories. The political and economic setbacks may then also have intensified the tensions within the dynasty

[71] Rezakhani (2022).

inherent in every monarchical system; the eye of the needle of succession to the throne is even narrower in times of crisis than at times when, for example, tensions between factions at court can be defused by generous prospects of booty and benefice (official and dignified positions, etc.).

However, the loss of territory cannot automatically be interpreted as a general break between past and present: In contrast to nation-states, not least in antiquity, imperial borders are rarely precisely defined and impermeable dividing lines, and the end of an empire is not synonymous with the end of mobility, communication and information. As a rule, imperial borders are more permeable than today's state borders, for example for merchants, 'believers' in search of holy places, elites with a desire for culturally useful, foreign status indicators and/or residents with traditional neighbourhood contacts. And no new regime can do without the political-administrative-economic expertise of local experts, especially in a phase of empire-building. The examples of the Sasanid occupation of Kushanshahr (see the Rag-i Bibi relief) and the so-called Kushano-Sasanians show this quite clearly: The figures on the relief from Baghlan in Kushan costume announce the efforts of the new ruler Shabuhr to gain recognition among the regional elites; the rebellion of Ormies, regardless of whether he is identical with the Kushano-Sasanid Ohrmazd or not, is not conceivable without support in the former Kushan heartland; the above-mentioned characteristics of the rule of the Sasanid vassals there, which have earned them the name Kushano-Sasanians, refer to the Kushan heritage of their rule; and finally, the roles of the Bactrian language and of Gandharan art in post-Kushan times are also evidence of these political and cultural transformation processes. We are much less informed about the situation in Northern India during the transition from Kushan to Gupta rule: But the few clues we have are enough for us to assume that these territories underwent similar developments as the old heartlands in the West.

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Part II

Islam/Muslim World

From Universalism to Regionalism: The Question of the Break-Up of the Abbasid Empire Revisited

Lutz Berger

1 Decline and Fall of Empires: Types of Imperial Collapse

This paper sets out to explain the break-up of imperial statehood in the tenth century caliphate. To do so, it seems wise to ask what we mean, when we refer to the decline and fall of empire. In the case of the Roman Empire in the West at least (and to a certain degree also in seventh century Byzantium) the decline of empire is not only the break-up of a polity, but it is more: what we see is the collapse of a complex social order and its substitution by much simpler and, on an economic level, less effective structures.[1] With the dissolution of the Roman State, its bureaucracy and its mechanisms of taxation, urban civilisation and all it stood for also disappeared. This in turn led to the disappearance of comfort, to use the terms Ward-Perkins employed in his influential study.[2] For the elites, but also for the common man, life became simpler. Only the Latin language and some symbolic items of the old imperial cultural world remained, but the core was gone.

This most thoroughgoing type of collapse of empire is not necessarily the most common. When talking about the decline of an empire, often we do not mean the decline of the whole social structure that makes up this empire, but only a change of government – sometimes misleadingly called *regime change*. Some adjustments notwithstanding, the

[1] Tainter (1988).

[2] Ward-Perkins (2005).

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polity and the society that undergo this type of change remain more or less the same. What we see in these cases is not so much structural social and political transformation but rather a change of personnel most of all at the top levels of the social and political hierarchy. A typical case of change of government in the first centuries of Islam would be the so-called Abbasid Revolution of the mid-eighth century. What we find here is dynastic change, the substitution of elite groups from Syria and the Jazeera by people from Khorassan, maybe also a certain speeding up of processes of social transformation all of which (e.g. the integration of non-Arab Muslims, decline of the role of tribalism in politics) were well under way before the revolution. But in most respects the development of early Muslim society continued as before.[3]

Finally, on a different level, the end of empire may be seen as the loss of a centre's control over its periphery. This is of great importance to the discussion of our topic, as we will see. Such a loss of control can take two main forms: The first is the takeover of the centre by the periphery. This takes place when the centre is momentarily weak but still worth taking and, at the same time, people from the periphery have the power necessary for such a takeover. Of course, such attempts may not always succeed.

The second (and more common) type is the breaking away of the periphery that may then result either in decline of complex society or a mere change of government/regime. This happens when power and resources of the centre decrease to the point that it loses control over some provinces, but at the same time elites in the periphery do not think it possible (they are too weak) or worthwhile (they are too well of) to risk their position by making a bid for power at the centre.

The Abbasid Revolution was an example of the first type, the periphery taking control of the richest provinces of the caliphate, namely Iraq. The breaking away of the western Maghreb and Al-Andalus in the wake of this revolution was an example of the second type. The Abbasids didn't have the military manpower to continue to project central power over regions that, at the time, were rather poor anyway.[4]

2 Reasons for Imperial Collapse

The last two points have already led us to the discussion of the causes of imperial decline, but they are not the only ones.

Empires as understood in this paper being, in the first place, politico-military structures, it is obvious that their end may be brought about by the appearance of neighbours that are, in one way or the other, better organised for war and cannot be co-opted. This may lead to the take-over of one empire by another as with the pre-Columbian American Empires and

[3]For this view of the Abbasid Revolution Cobb (2010: 266–268); A more traditional view is expressed for example in Lapidus (2002: 56–64).

[4]For an overview of the Abbasid Revolution and what it meant see: El-Hibri (2010).

Spain. It may also be the case that staving the enemies off may put massive structural strain on the empire leading to civil turmoil.

External pressure can become unbearable even more easily once internal factors cause trouble as well. Empires feed on booty during periods of expansion, they might profit from the control of trade, but in pre-modern times more than anything else they relied on agrarian resources. Without fertile agrarian heartlands to feed troops and bureaucracies there could be no empire. This being so, any unmitigated decline of productivity of the central resource base would lead to decline of the imperial structure as a whole.

An empire always depends on the cohesion and loyalty of its leading groups. This cohesion might be undermined by ideological factors as e.g. a major religious split within the elite and spark civil war. We will see if this played a major role in the case in question. What can lead to a split amongst the elites is paradoxically also the disappearance of differences that had bound an elite together against other groups of diverging persuasions. As long as imperial elites are culturally aloof from the local population but at the same time very much integrated among themselves they have every interest to preserve imperial unity. As soon, by contrast, as these elites are integrated in local societies they rule and lose their exclusiveness and coherence, they may choose to opt for local interests and an alliance with local groups at the cost of imperial unity.[5]

3 The Abbasid Empire: Forces of Stability and Unity

As has already been said, the Abbasid take-over, the toppling of the Umayyads, wasn't the end of the Islamic state as it had existed before but rather was a change of government. Instead of the old ruling family and its hangers-on, it was a new one that controlled the centre of power. Instead of troops from Syria and the Jazeera, it was now the Khurassani army that was in a privileged position. But as regards the methods of rule, and even the ideology of the caliphate, there was not as much change as might have been expected. Nonetheless the years of turmoil before and during the revolution had led to some marginal damages. The provinces to the far west of the Muslim world were given up. From the eastern vantage point of the caliphs, they were hardly of any consequence and had only loosely been controlled before anyway. It simply was not worthwhile to reconquer lands that at the time probably did only barely produce the sums that were needed to keep them obedient.

The money the Abbasids needed to keep their empire going was to be found in the very region that they chose as the seat of their power. In the golden prime of the Abbasid dynasty Iraq produced nearly as much agricultural tax income as all other provinces combined.[6] Whoever controlled Iraq had the cash to send troops wherever they were needed. But it was

[5] This last point has been stressed by Kennedy (2004).

[6] Kennedy (2004).

not the seemingly unlimited productive capacity of Iraq alone that before the mid-eighth century kept the empire together. The Abbasids could rely on military and civilian elites who had a vested interest in the continuing unity of the realm. The Khurassani army that had brought the Abbasids to power continued to play a very important role at the centre at least until the civil war of the early ninth century. Military commanders and high bureaucrats formed a distinct social milieu that stuck together and was very much horizontally mobile throughout the empire.[7] They exercised control over the provinces but for each of them the centre remained the fountainhead of advancement and privilege. To seek independence in a province where they happened to work for some time was a less attractive perspective than to further their career at the centre.

4 Breakdown at Centre I: Al-Mutawakkil, the Period of Anarchy at Samarra (861–870), and the Great Slave Revolt

All this began to change during the first half of the ninth century. A civil war between the caliph al-Amin and his brother al-Ma'mun had created rifts within the military. The old Khurassani army in Iraq saw control taken from its hands by newcomers from the east who had been brought in by al-Ma'mun. In the following decades the caliphs tried to make themselves independent of the Khurassanis by creating a new army of slave soldiers imported from central Asia.[8] Such slave soldiers did not have the complicated loyalties and, at least in the beginning, the pretensions of the old elite soldiers. But slave armies had decisive drawbacks nonetheless. They were expensive to recruit and rather soon they started to develop loyalties among themselves that their owners were not always capable to control. What is worse, the leaders of the slave regiments and other military groups that were called according to the origins of their main components began to exercise influence in court politics and jockeyed for control over the caliph who was theoretically deemed to be their undisputed master. This caliph in the mid-ninth century was al-Mutawakkil who was obviously a figure of some authority, but in comparison with his predecessors he had lost much of his religious prestige. It was in al-Mutawakkil's time that the caliphs finally gave up their pretensions to be the main source of religious guidance. This role was given to the Sunni scholars who had gained prestige before by resisting the attempts of al-Ma'mun to impose upon them the views of the rationalising Mu'tazili school of theology.[9] The caliph having lost his religious charisma things were not made better by the fact that al-Mutawakkil tried to impress his subjects by massive building of palaces. When he finally had fallen out with his son and heir apparent things were coming to a head.

[7] Kennedy (2004).

[8] This process was more complicated than was thought previously, cf. Étienne de la Vaissière (2007).

[9] Berger (2010: 73–78).

After a long drinking bout on a bleak December night in the year 861 al-Mutawakkil was killed by his slave guard, as it seems at the instigation of his disgruntled son.[10]

The killing of the caliph had broken a taboo. The unthinkable had become possible and the ongoing financial difficulties made infighting over resources only ever more violent. During the following decade the court went through a series of bloody conflicts, caliphs being proclaimed and reversed in a continuous merry-go-round of military factions gaining and losing control.[11]

After a decade of chaos not all was lost. At the end of the ninth century the Abbasid family still could boast individuals who, by taking active roles in warfare, regained the respect of the army. Still, the territories these leaders where fighting in were not somewhere in the lands of Byzantium but rather southern Iraq where the regime confronted a long drawn-out revolt of the plantation slaves. These had been imported from East Africa to do the hard work of keeping the salty swamps of southern Iraq fertile. The rebellion destroyed the central agricultural base of the regime.[12] That this base was gone beyond any hope of recovery was not quite clear at the time. Thus leading men in the provinces still thought it was worthwhile to make a bid for power at the centre. This held true most of all for the governor of Egypt, Ibn Tulun. Ibn Tulun was a slave soldier who, as was typical in his generation, had strong links to the Iraq military elite from which he stemmed. He ruled Egypt as a de facto independent ruler. Nonetheless, it seems as if this was not the ultimate goal of his ambitions. When a conflict between the caliph al-Mu'tamid and his brother al-Muwaffaq, who was the leader of the army, offered the opportunity, Ibn Tulun did everything he could to make his presence felt at the centre. He tried unsuccessfully to get hold of the caliph. Nor was he alone in this. The Tahirids of eastern Iran had played an important role in Iraqi politics for decades.[13]

This shows that in the 880 s there was a loss of central control but the reaction of people in both centre and periphery proved that the empire and control over Iraq still meant something. It was only in the tenth century that the crisis of the empire really moved from its centripetal to its centrifugal stage.

5 Breakdown at Centre II: The Tenth Century

At the beginning of the tenth century things seemed to stabilise. The long uprising of the slaves in southern Iraq had finally been subdued and one might have held hopes for a restoration of the empire's power. But the mirror had cracked and there was no way back to the halcyon days of yore. This held true most of all for the irremediable decline of Iraqi

[10] El-Hibri (2010: 296–304).

[11] Bonner (2010: 308–313).

[12] Bonner (2010: 323–325); on figures for this Kennedy (2004).

[13] Bonner (2010: 313–315).

agriculture. Yields declined as a consequence of increasing salinization of arable land and there were no slaves left who could be set to work to change this.[14] As the financial basis of the regime had broken away, there was no hope to durably stop the infighting of bureaucratic and military factions at the centre. It was the law of the jungle that decided who would profit from what was left of the Iraqi tax-base. The situation was compounded by an increasing ideological division of Muslim population. The caliph had lost much of his religious charisma. Shiite propagandists of different persuasions tried to fill the ideological void that had been caused by the Abbasid caliphs' effacement. Even at court some bureaucrats were now openly Shiite, but what was worse there were uprisings in the name of different Shiite pretenders, imaginary or real, in southern Iraq and the Gulf coast of Arabia, in Syria and finally in the Maghreb. The centre didn't have the resources necessary to stem the tide. Shiite polities were being set up on the Gulf, in the Maghreb and finally in Egypt. These polities were independent not only de facto, but didn't even accept the principle of an Abbasid caliphate.[15]

But even for those who retained their allegiance to the Abbasid caliphs, this allegiance didn't mean the same thing anymore. The imperial elites had gone native. Especially in the East they identified and associated more with local power groups and their cultural world than with their colleagues in other parts of the empire. The erstwhile united imperial elite, the "Reichsaristokratie" of the Muslim Empire whose members might have served one year in Egypt and another one in Central Asia didn't exist anymore. This change was the consequence of the decline of central power and resources, but it was at the same time the result of the fact that now all over the Muslim world there were large groups of local Muslims with whom the governors could and would collaborate.[16] To secure power in a province it was by now much more useful to gain the goodwill of this local Muslim elite than to hope for support against them from a distant and decisively weakened caliph. As they could not hope for central support and tried to stabilise their rule, regional governors increasingly followed the model of the caliph by importing slave soldiers from across the next border who were deemed to be of absolute loyalty to their master. This meant the periphery was following a caliphal pattern, but this didn't necessarily strengthen the bond between the centre and the provincial rulers – apart from the fact of course that the centre's use of slave soldiers only made the centre more dependant of the periphery: The Iraqi troops had to be replenished by the services of governors of the central Asian frontier provinces near to the main sources of military slaves.

[14] This I would suggest was the main cause for the decline of Iraqi agriculture. Of course the slave rebellion was not the only war damaging Iraqi agriculture and irrigation, nor was it the last, the Qarmati wars against radical Shii revolutionaries continued well into the tenth century, on these Halm (1988: 205–208), but I would suggest they were the most important single element and certainly led to the end of the upkeep of arable land by the help of slave labour; for other wars etc. and their effects see Kennedy (2004).

[15] Halm (1991) on the most important of these movements.

[16] Kennedy (2004).

For governors' formal investiture by the caliph still was of some worth in order to legitimise their claims to rulership in the eyes of the religiously minded. In contrast to even the late ninth century, now provincial governors didn't see any interest in getting involved in Iraqi affairs. Control over the centre had ceased to count for more than control over a province. If the caliph was not to the liking of a governor the latter would simply choose to ignore him.

6 Demise and Survival: What Is Falling in the Fall of the Abbasids?

It is time now to collect the bits and pieces and to look more systematically into what is falling in the fall of the Abbasids. We can begin with something that is not falling: the institution of the caliphate as such. The caliphs had lost their political power and they had also lost their pretension to a pivotal role in the definition of orthodoxy. But while they didn't rule anymore, no one (except for the supporters of Shiite pretenders) objected to the fact that they continued to reign. The caliph stayed useful because he had become an innocuous figurehead who would legitimise the rule of whosoever was asking him for acknowledgment. This was to continue for several centuries. Only in the last period of their rule, in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, were the Abbasid caliphs able to use their remaining prestige and their role as leaders of local Sunni society to regain regional power in Iraq at least.

This survival of the caliphate as a hollow shell led to the strange and unusual situation that in the Abbasid case the central institution of government survived, but that the state had dissolved. The Abbasid family continued to play a certain role and certain symbolic acts showed they were still at least outwardly revered. On the other hand, apart from Iraq where the Abbasid military and bureaucracy vied for local power, the Empire as a meaningful political unit had disappeared.

As we have seen, this decentralisation went through two phases: A first, when the centre was too weak to always impose its will on the periphery but was still a prize worth taking, a second, when the further weakening of the centre led to its becoming increasingly insignificant in comparison with other goals local rulers might set themselves.

This imperial collapse that was for all practical purposes nearly absolute didn't lead to a breakdown of complex society. What we see is a breaking away of the periphery that is tantamount to a change of government on the local level, not more. In the provinces bureaucratic regimes and urban culture survived without a change. Rather to the contrary: the fact that provincial governors now tried to play the role of independent princes led them to become patrons of art and culture in their regions. They once had sought legitimacy primarily in Baghdad, now it was to be sought for by supporting local Muslim intellectuals and artists. Complex society therefore not only survived but even gained in width and depth because of decentralisation of power.

7 Reasons for Regionalisation

The political disintegration of the empire set the stage for the Fatimid takeover of Northern Africa, for the central Asian Ghuzz, nomadic Turkish tribes, occupying the eastern caliphate,[17] for the Byzantines becoming more of a nuisance at the end of the tenth century and finally also for the crusades. But was the end of expansion and the rise of unknown foreign threats the root cause of imperial decline? At the beginning of Islam, expansion had brought booty. It gave the ruler the possibility to put the soldiers to use and in early Abbasid times also to forge bonds with them during common adventures. Internal disintegration started in the decades when caliphs stopped being effective leaders of the armies and offensive warfare in foreign parts was not on the agenda anymore. But there had never been much more than symbolic offensive warfare since the Abbasids had taken over without this relative peacefulness of the regime leading to disintegration. As it was, foreign invasions seem to be a consequence rather than the cause of weakness.

At a first glance one could say that the loss of religious legitimacy of the caliphs played a role, as Shiite groups became more and more successful contenders on the political scene. But if we dig a bit deeper, things look different: People who would follow Shiite propaganda were no friends of the Abbasids no matter what they did. But the caliphs managed to unite all Sunni groups under their leadership precisely by relinquishing their religious pretensions. They were even able to gain the pragmatic support of those Shiites who were not affiliated to the Ismailis and hence had no caliphal pretenders of their own. All this might have been more difficult had the caliphs' religious role been more pronounced. The toning down of the caliphs' religious role, rather than weakening their position, allowed them to stay on. Religious authority among the Sunnis was now in the hands of scholars, saints, and Sufis who in their great majority now had become supporters of the Abbasid figureheads of the Sunni community.

Hence, neither external threats nor religion were really decisive. What caused the disintegration of the Empire were the two other possible factors hinted to above: The fact that imperial elites became entrenched locally and lost their cohesion and empire-wide connections on the one hand, and the fact that after the ninth century no imperial centre had the resources that were needed to make loyalty to this centre seem worthwhile even at the expense of regional independence.

8 Postface: Abbasids and Carolingians

Let us finally take a short comparative look at the Carolingian Empire whose disintegration took place at approximately the same time! This might help us to see which of the factors that played a role in Abbasid imperial disintegration should be taken into account in a more

[17] On the Ghuzz, Peacock (2015: 20–71).

general theory of imperial decline. This holds true even more as there were marked differences between both empires. In the Carolingian case the collapse of complex society had already taken place in the period immediately before. In many respects the Carolingian Empire was a simpler structure than the Abbasid one. Of course, we should not underrate Carolingian administrative capacity. The term *Reichsaristokratie* used above had been coined not least to refer to the members of the very mobile elite of the Carolingian Empire who owned property all over Western Europe and obviously were very well capable of controlling estates hundreds of miles away,[18] therefore, there was a certain amount of administrative expertise on which estate owners could rely. This remarkable administrative capacity notwithstanding, any member of the Abbasid elite would have found the standard of living and the procedures of rule in the Carolingian empire primitive while the reverse certainly was not true as can be gleaned from Einhard's famous passages on Aaron, the King of the Persians, (i.e. the caliph Harun al-Rashid, Charlemagne's contemporary).

As regards the Carolingians, a decline of the imperial resource base, that seems to have been the central point in Abbasid case, can be ruled out as primary reason for disintegration. In Merovingian and Carolingian time agriculture, the mainstay of the economy, certainly was not too productive, but we have no reason whatsoever to presume that it became decisively less so during the ninth century. Nothing akin to the great calamity that had befallen the Abbasids when Iraq ceased to be the powerhouse of Middle Eastern agriculture was happening to the Carolingian economy.

But there is something else: In the Carolingian case as in the Muslim Abbasid one the end of imperial expansion and the end of imperial unity seem directly linked. Soon after expansion stopped, decline set in. Was there nothing left worth conquering? This plays a role in the Muslim case. After 750, the effort to go on stood in no relation to the costs. Why conquer eighth century Gaul? In Africa gold might have been an incentive for further expansion to the south. But, how manage to cross the Sahara with an army to get to the sources of this gold with the means at the Muslims' disposal? Does the same hold true in the Carolingian case? No! In the more rustic circumstances of the West even poorer countries might have something to offer to conquerors less spoiled than the Muslims at the time and therefore less demanding. The Saxons in Charlemagne's time had to learn this at their expense. So why did Louis the Pious and his sons not continue to conquer in northerly or easterly direction? What is more, Muslim Spain with all the civil wars raging there in the ninth century might also have been an easy prey for aggressive Frankish foreign policy. It was thus neither the lack of possible objectives nor the power of overmighty neighbours that prevented the latter-day Carolingians from continuing Charlemagne's policies but rather other causes. Foreign threats were not the origin of domestic crisis, domestic crisis led to Carolingian weakness in the face of foreign threats.

As it seems in this case as well, it was the loss of unity of the imperial elites that was at the origin of imperial disintegration. This unity was threatened by the disunity of the

[18] Wickham (2010: 402f).

imperial family itself. The civil wars of the ninth century and the confiscations of property of everybody supporting their rivals to which the ninth-century Carolingian kings resorted, made it impossible for the highest layer of the aristocracy to keep possessions scattered all over the empire.[19] The *Reichsaristokratie* was forced to take root locally and lost sight of the imperial whole. In the process they became associated with the lower layers of the nobility of the respective parts of what had been the Empire of Charlemagne.

In both cases, the Carolingian and the Abbasid, it was the loosening of bonds among the imperial elites that sealed the fate of the empire. In the Abbasid case this loosening was brought about by the fact that the dwindling resources of the imperial centre made the *Reichsaristokratie* lose their interest in a continuation of unity, while at the same time taking root and integration with local elites became easier.

In the Frankish case internecine warfare and its consequences took away these resources and forced the top level of the aristocracy to a more hidebound outlook.

Imperial disintegration is the outcome of an interplay of structural forces and events that in the end paved the way for disintegration. Probably in most great imperial structures the members of the elite sooner or later lose their *'asabiyya*, their group solidarity, to use the famous term of Ibn Khaldun, the late fourteenth century Maghrebi precursor of modern sociology. This will always lead to imperial disintegration (if not other factors have before that caused the dissolution of empire).[20] The question then is only, when and under what circumstances this unavoidable process sets in.

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[19] Wickham (2010: 402f).

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The End of the Mongol Empire

Jürgen Paul

Was there a "decline and fall" story of the Mongol Empire? Either of the empire as a unit or of the four khanates which were its immediate successors or both? Did the Mongol Empire thus follow the pattern famously propounded by Edward Gibbon in the eighteenth century? This has recently been the matter of some controversy between two of the foremost specialists in the field. On the one hand, David Morgan has discussed the end of the four khanates, successors to the unitary empire which he does not take into account, in a comparative perspective.[1] He asks whether the "Gibbonian paradigm" is used in this context because it fits the source record or because we have become so accustomed to it that we do not readily consider other scenarios. Morgan then continues to say that the Iranian Ilkhanate fell without internal revolt or attack from the outside.

Morgan's position has met with considerable opposition. Most notably, Charles Melville has argued that the Iranian Ilkhanate did decline long before it fell. In particular, Melville has pointed out that the seeds of disaster were visible already in the early fourteenth century, decades before the fall. The last Ilkhans were unable to rule without the consensus of the leading emirs, and increasingly, factional fighting between these emirs made the position of the ruling sultan precarious.[2] Melville does not explicitly refer to the "Gibbonian paradigm", but it seems clear that he is closer to it than Morgan.

[1] Morgan (2009).

[2] Melville (2016: 309–35); Melville has presented a very detailed study of the last ten years of Ilkhanid rule: Melville (1999).

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In this paper, I try to avoid the "decline and fall" paradigm. Empires do not necessarily decline before they fall, if "decline" is a good term at all for describing empires in their later stages. Melville and Morgan agree that it is difficult to measure decline. How do we observe it in the sources? Does economic decline have to go together with political instability? Do we mean institutional change, and which change would then be a sign of decline? Does decline have to be a drawn-out affair, and how long can it last before the empire finally falls? All these considerations make me inclined to drop the decline metaphor altogether.

1 Fission Processes

The Mongol Empire was not conquered by outside enemies: on the contrary, with its successor states, it was and remained one of the most formidable military powers in Eurasia far into the fourteenth century, and in certain places, much longer. Internal revolt was the main factor behind the end of just one (out of four) successor states, the Yuan dynasty in China, or Khanate China, as Paul Buell puts it.[3] There was only one "Iranian" rebellion in Iran, the Sarbadār movement, and that was a regional event and came after the end of the Ilkhanate.[4] There were no rebellions on the steppes of the Golden Horde and even the situation in the Rus' principalities was not so bad. There were no, or next to no, rebellions in Transoxiana and the Chaghatay realms.[5] So this is not the main point, either. Neither did the Mongol empire collapse or implode everywhere, successor states can be identified in some regions until the seventeenth and even eighteenth century, such as the Crimean Khanate or the Chaghatay dynasty in Central Asia or the post-Timurid Chinggisid dynasties in Transoxiana or the Kazakh khanates. In these regions, the metaphors of collapse and implosion are much too violent. If a metaphor is needed, it would be fading away.

The end of the Mongol Empire is best described as dissolution or disintegration, a fission process.[6] I argue that the Mongol empire and its immediate successors—excepting China—found their end because of internal problems which boiled down to the inability to prevent fission. I think that this was an in-built inability and did not have much to do with political mistakes that leaders may have made; in that understanding, the end of the empire and its immediate successor states was inevitable. The basic features of the process can be observed in all three western khanates. The speed of fission processes and the forms which the resulting polities took depended on the previous political system in the region, and also on the geographical, economic, and social setting: it went quickest and was most thorough

[3] "Qanate China", in Buell (2003).

[4] Smith (1970), Aubin (1974), Aigle (2015).

[5] Excepting the Tarabi rebellion in Bukhara very early in the Mongol period; Bregel (1990).

[6] Jackson's title "The dissolution of the Mongol empire" is very appropriate, Jackson (1978).

in Iran, it was slower in the other two khanates, and there, Chinggisid ideology and regional Chinggisid dynasties carried on for centuries.

2 First Stage: Breakup of the Unitary Empire

Fission went on in two or more stages. In the first stage, the unitary Mongol world empire dissolved. This dissolution can be dated, if a handy date is needed, to 1259–60 when the succession of Möngke (r. 1251–9) was disputed and two men were crowned simultaneously as Great Khan, both brothers of the deceased: Qubilai in China and Arig Böke in Mongolia. As a result, the by and large collective administration of the sedentary parts of the empire ended, and the four immediate successor states emerged as more or less independent: the Yuan dynasty in China; the khanate later called the Golden Horde in the Qipchaq steppe; the Ilkhanate in Iran; and the Ulus Chaghatay in Central Asia. The unitary empire was not restored even though some kind of (short-lived) understanding was reached between the warring successor states in 1303.[7]

For this first stage of fission, the sheer size of the unitary empire has been quoted as a reason.[8] It simply was not feasible to administer such an enormous area from one single centre even though the Mongols proved very good at dealing with this challenge. Another reason for fission at this stage was the practice of sharing out appanages between the family and most important retainers of the conqueror.[9] Chinggis did not share out the conquered regions wholesale, but he did assign the steppe lands to his sons; the conquered sedentary regions were not divided but came under the purview of a structure designed to provide revenue for the dynasty and its followers: in this case, shares were allocated, but they were not necessarily defined in territorial terms. Even in this partial sharing out of the conquered lands one can see the seeds of fission.[10] The division of the sedentary regions came as a result of this first stage of fission and the emergence of the four successor khanates: Iran and China were based on sedentary regions; the Chaghatay khanate included another one (Transoxiana and the oasis cities in Turkestan); the Golden Horde had a number of sedentary areas such as the Crimea, Khwārazm, the middle Volga, all of which later were nuclei of regional states.[11] It is a moot point whether or in which understanding Russia was part of the Golden Horde.[12] But on the whole, the Golden Horde and the Chaghatay khanate were much more steppe-centred than either China or Iran.

[7] There is a vast literature on the topic, see: Allsen (2001a, 2001b), Jackson (1978, 2000, 2009, 2017) to name but a few.

[8] Morgan (2009).

[9] "Sharing out" quotes Allsen (2001a); for appanages see Munkh-Erdene (2016).

[10] Unitary administration: Buell (2003).

[11] Mirgaleev (2016a, 2016b), Reva (2016).

[12] Halperin (1982); See Allsen (2006) for an assessment of the differences between Russia and other agricultural regions. Russia is part of the northern tier which was administered along the routines which first were designed for the "forest peoples".—I think that Halperin's understanding of "ulus" is

Allsen discusses the earlier administration with its complex system of allocations, both territorial and non-territorial, as a means to prevent fission.[13] In many other steppe empires, the realm was divided up among the heirs of the first conqueror immediately after his death—this happened to Timur's empire in the early fifteenth century, for instance. Therefore, the fact that in the case of the Mongol Empire fission set in only in the generation of Chinggis Khan's grandsons can be seen as an achievement. On the same lines, the administrative routines which were based on the same principles in all khanates were a means to make the mobility of high administrative personnel possible. The census, the taxation, the postal system, the organisation of the population according to the decimal system, the principles underlying the military, and last but not least the shared Chinggisid legitimacy all worked against the fission process.[14] After the dissolution of the unitary empire, one still can speak of a Mongol space, and there still was a Great Khan, even if he no longer was unanimously recognised. Marie Favereau speaks of the Mongol space as a "Mongol commonwealth" or a "meta-empire", and she calls the successor states "sub-empire". She does not offer an extensive discussion of these terms, but they are worth keeping in mind.[15]

Another means to prevent fission would have been inter-marriage between the *ulus*es. This however was precluded by Mongol rules of exogamy.[16]

Thus, on the whole, Mongol leaders did see the danger of fission and did a lot to prevent it, but in the long run, their efforts were not successful.

3 Second Stage: China

The second stage of fission concerns the immediate successor states. As noted above, I think that the history of China is different. The Yuan dynasty was driven out of China in 1368 as a result of increasingly powerful rebel movements, one of which brought the succeeding Ming dynasty (1368–1644) to the throne. No fission processes of the kind observed elsewhere are on record in Ming China (for the best of my knowledge). The Yuan emperor fled north to the steppe, and in Mongolia, the dynasty continued as Northern Yuan

too much predicated on its territorial facet. Territorially speaking, the Russian principalities may not have been part of the ulus. But the income from them was part of the khan's patrimony, and Russia is called "Tsarev ulus" (*ulus* of the Tsar) because the tribute from there accrued to the Golden Horde, later the Great Horde khan exclusively. It was the khan of the Golden Horde who was called tsar in this period, the Russian princes were dukes or grand-dukes, not tsar.

[13] Allsen (2001a).

[14] Buell (2003) gives credit for many of these to Ögedei rather than Möngke.

[15] Favereau-Doumenjou and Geevers (2018: 457–462).

[16] Atwood (2015), Broadbridge (2016).

for quite a while. This Northern Yuan state in turn was subject to the same fission processes as the other successor states to the Chinggisid empire.[17]

4 Second Stage: Iran

For the western three successor states, the time frame differs widely, but we will see that the process basically entailed the same stages. The Ilkhanate, the Mongol state in Iran founded by Hülegü (1256–65),[18] is said to have ended between 1335 when the last generally accepted Ilkhan Abū Saᶜīd (1316–35) died without a heir; and in 1353, when the last man ever to have been enthroned as Ilkhan, Taghai Temür (1338–53), was murdered. After the death of Abū Saᶜīd, not only were no sons available, but those descendants of Hülegü who were proposed never managed to build a sufficient power base. The ensuing infighting produced a large number of regional states in Iran and Anatolia; Roemer lists fifteen for Iran alone.[19] In Anatolia, the Eretna sultanate was the principal successor state. The Eretna sultanate in turn underwent fission since the 1360s, its fission products existed until conquest by Timur around 1400 and then by the Ottomans.[20] Only a few of the successor states to the Ilkhanate were ruled by Chinggisids. Chinggisid legitimation was not dropped everywhere, however: some dynasties used descent through the female line as legitimising argument, such as the Jalayirids.[21]

5 Second Stage: Golden Horde

The Golden Horde was divided into two wings from the start: an eastern one which was called the Ulus Orda after one of Jochi's many sons; and a western where Batu (1226–56), another son of Jochi, emerged as the founding figure. For the sake of convenience, I'll call the Ulus Orda the "Ulus of the Left Hand" and the regions west of the Urals the "Golden Horde".[22] The Golden Horde went through a period of instability following the death of

[17] For Yuan: Buell (2003), Jackson (2009) as starting points.

[18] The Ilkhanate is difficult to date also for its beginning; parts of Iran such as Khurasan, Azerbaijan and parts of Anatolia had been part of the empire before Hülegü set out on his campaign in 1255; the conquest of Baghdad 1258 which is often given as the inception of the Ilkhanate is not a good date because the concept of Ilkhanate itself presupposes the dissolution of the unitary world empire, which, however, was still going strong as long as Möngke lived. Kolbas (2006).

[19] Roemer (1989: 20).

[20] Göde (1994) for the Eretna sultanate; Yücel (1989) for this and other regional states.

[21] Wing (2016), Melville (1999).

[22] The term Golden Horde comes from the Russian sources and is not used before the sixteenth century. For the terms "White" or "Blue Horde" for the western or eastern parts of the Ulus Jochi see: Allsen (1985 [1987]), Kawaguchi and Nagamine (2016).

Berdibeg in 1359 who died without male offspring whereas descendants of Batu had become rare, but in distinction from the Ilkhanate, the khanate survived and was reunited under a representative of the Left Hand, Toqtamysh (r. 1376–95).[23] After a last period of unity under the non-Chinggisid Edigü (d. 1419) who ruled with puppet Chinggisid khans, however, fission processes resumed and produced a number of successor states such as the Great Horde, the Nogay Horde or Manghit Ulus, the Khanates of Kazan', Astrakhan', Kasimov, the Crimea, Sibir and so forth.[24] Nearly all of these were ruled by Jochids, and all of them were conquered by Russia at some point, mostly in the sixteenth century; the Crimea lasted, under Ottoman suzerainty, until the late eighteenth century. The Ulus of the Left Hand disintegrated into a number of successor states as well, one of those was ruled by descendants of Jochi's son Shiban: the Shibanid Abū l-Khayr Khan established his rule over much of what is today Kazakhstan in the mid-fifteenth century. His grandson in turn set out to conquer Transoxiana from the Timurids: Muḥammad Shibani Khan founded the Shibanid state in Transoxiana in around 1500, a Chinggisid renaissance in what used to be the Timurid core region. Chinggisid rule in Transoxiana and Khwārazm lasted until the mid-eighteenth century, with a number of dynasties all descended from Jochi.[25]

6 Second Stage: Chaghatay Khanate

The Chaghatay khanate was divided into two spheres after the last khan to be recognised in the entire khanate had been killed in 1347. In the south-western sphere, the oasis regions of Transoxiana and northern Afghanistan, a non-Chinggisid amir, Qazaghan from the Qaraʾunas, came to power, he ruled through Chinggisid puppet khans.[26] This practice continued under Timur who also availed himself of puppet khans until 1403, that is, almost until his own death in 1405. Before Timur could establish his rule in 1370, however, this part of the former Chaghatay khanate split into a number of regional entities, most of them including an urban centre, an agricultural region and an amount of pasture. The Qaraʾunas amirs and their puppet khans were not unanimously recognised.

In the north-eastern sphere, Chinggisid-Chaghatayid rule continued. Toghluq Temür (d. 1363) tried repeatedly to reunite the khanate under his own rule, but his efforts did not meet with lasting success. When his son Ilyās Khwāja was assassinated in 1368, there was no Chaghatayid khan in that region until the enthronement of Khiḍr Khwāja, son of Ilyās, in 1389. Instead of a Chinggisid, an amir from the Dughlat family ruled, Qamar al-Dīn,

[23] DeWeese (2000), Mirgaleev (2016b).

[24] Trepavlov (2016a, 2016b).

[25] Welsford (2013).

[26] Qaraʾunas: Aubin (1969), Bernardini (2013); for the Chaghatay khanate in general: Aubin (1976), Grupper (1992–4), Kim (2000), Biran (2009, 2015); for the transition to Timurid rule: Manz (1989); For the question of whether Timurid rule should be seen as a continuation of the Chaghatay khanate: Morgan (2000), Manz (2016); also Grupper (1992–4) who sees this as evident.

who also may have been behind the killing of Ilyās Khwāja. We will come back to the motives for this crime. Khiḍr Khwāja's lineage, however, remained on the throne in the area until 1678, in a much-reduced territorial frame since in the northern regions, Kazakh khanates, also under Chinggisid-Jochid rulers, took over in the late fifteenth century; the Kazakh khanates lasted into the eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries.

7 Disputed Successions

What were the dynamics behind these fission processes? Most scholars would point to the instable rules of succession in steppe dynasties. Indeed, succession was not clearly defined by a single rule such as primogeniture. In the unitary empire, there was a shift from one line of Chinggisids to another one, from the house of Ögödei to the house of Tolui. In the three khanates, lateral successions were frequent. In the Chaghatay khanate, for instance, numerous sons of Du'a (1282–1306) came to the throne in the early fourteenth century, and it was only after the last of these brothers had died that succession turned to the next generation.[27] Lateral succession may mean that the resources at the new ruler's disposal were not as plentiful as they would have been in direct succession: the new ruler did not automatically inherit his predecessor's belongings which went to his descendants.[28] But succession nevertheless tended to be in one line: whereas on principle, in the Ilkhanate as well as elsewhere, all descendants of Chinggis Khan were eligible, in practice, until 1335, all candidates to the throne in Iran were descended from Hülegü. In the Golden Horde, succession soon was in practice restricted to the house of Batu son of Jochi until this line ended with Berdibeg in 1359.

Therefore, the lack of direct male offspring was a problem when a ruler died. Frequently, scholars point to the fact that Abū Sa'īd had no sons as a reason why the dynasty ended. The problem is, however, why the relevant persons could not agree on one of the available descendants of Hülegü, or on a successor from another line, for that matter. It has to be observed as well that a similar situation obtained in the Golden Horde after the demise of Berdibeg in 1359: he did not have male offspring. Thus, for roughly twenty years, numerous pretenders appeared, and it seems unclear whether any of them was descended from Batu. In the Chaghatay Khanate, after the assassination of Ilyās Khwāja, only one of his sons survived as an infant, Khiḍr Khwāja, and it was only after twenty years of turmoil (with non-Chinggids claiming the title and throne of the khan) that Khiḍr Khwāja was enthroned.

One of the reasons why there were no sons (and no nephews or cousins either) in these cases is the killing off of brothers and cousins. This happened in the Ilkhanate under Ghazan (1295–1305) and in the Golden Horde under Berdibeg himself. In the Chaghatay

[27] Biran (2009).

[28] Pfeiffer (2003: 149).

Khanate, it was Qamar al-Dīn who killed off all the Chaghatayids he could lay his hands on. Thus, the situation was not exceptional but occurred at least once in each of the three western successor states. The results also were the same: dynastic crisis and arising questions of legitimacy.

Thus, the rules for succession—a large number of persons was eligible for rulership at least on principle—paradoxically led to a decrease in these numbers so that succession could be problematic because no more descendants were available, not only of the deceased ruler, but of the founder of the dynastic line in the successor state, neither.

More importantly, successions were frequently contested, and that led to interregna which ended only if one of the candidates succeeded in imposing himself. In the Ilkhanate, the interregnum which began in 1335 was not ended this way, no pretender could make good his claim. The interregnum in the Golden Horde ended only after twenty years after Berdibeg's death (1359), and the winner was Toqtamysh (r. 1376–95), a relative outsider, not a descendant of Batu but of Toqay Temür.[29] In the Chaghatay Khanate, there was an interregnum from 1368 to 1389 which was overcome only with difficulty. All three khanates therefore at some point had to face the situation that no Chinggisid was generally accepted as khan. The difference is that this situation ushered in the end for the Ilkhanids, whereas the Chaghatay khanate and the Golden Horde survived. In the Chaghatay khanate, the same dynastic line continued after the interruption whereas in the Golden Horde, the new ruler represented another dynastic line.

8 From Patrimonial Household to Aristocratic Rule

Besides the rules of succession which fostered fission, one has to look at the inner circle of power, the ruler, his household and his immediate retinue, the great emirs. The royal family and the great emirs together would have had to agree on a successor, and on a shift in dynastic lineage once the earlier house had died out, and in the Ilkhanate as well as in the Golden Horde, evidently, they were unable to come to a decision.[30] Therefore, we have to look for changes in these circles.

The most important institution in this context is the imperial guard or *keshig*. Fortunately, much research has been devoted to its history over the last decades.[31] The first *keshig* was founded by Chinggis even before he was made Qaʾan in 1206. The commanders of the guard troops were given household titles such as cook, steward, quiver-bearer, secretary and such like. At first, the guard troops were not numerous; later, they were

[29] Descendants of Toqay Temür had not been considered for the throne earlier because he was born to a minor wife of Jochi. In the first generations of Chinggisid rule, maternal descent mattered quite a lot, and only sons of main wives were eligible for the succession.

[30] For the institution of the *quriltai*, Hodous (2012–3).

[31] Schamiloglu (1984), Atwood (2006a), Hope (2017), Grupper (1992–4), Melville (2013); to name but a few.

enlarged to ten thousand. Chinggis himself chose the guard commanders from among his oldest and most trustworthy companions. Many important positions throughout the empire were filled with men from the imperial guard. *Keshig* elders were appointed as individuals, not as representatives of a given family.[32]

The *keshig* evolved in two ways. At first, it gave rise to the office of chief commander, *begleribeg*, which is on record in all three western khanates; he was one of the four *keshig* elders. This position came to be hereditary in the Golden Horde and the Chaghatay khanate. The reason for the revolt of Qamar al-Dīn was that the khan did not appoint him to this office which his brother had held earlier, but instead that man's son, a boy aged seven; the khan tried to free himself out of the tutelage of the Dughlat emirs. In the Golden Horde, the first *begleribeg* was Nogay (d. 1299), he was descended from Jochi, but through a lesser wife or concubine and therefore could not sit on the throne. In the interregnal period of the 1360s and 1370s, it was Mamai who was the man behind the throne. After Toqtamysh's reign, this position fell to the Manghit emir Edigü who passed it on to his son.[33]—In the Ilkhanate, the Suldus emir Chupan seems to have been the only one who consistently tried to get the khan under his control, but this did not work out well; too many families vied for this position, all of them well connected to the dynasty.[34]

At the same time, in all three khanates, apparently the positions of the other three *keshig* elders also came to be hereditary. Over time, thus, the *keshig* leadership changed in character. Whereas it had been a household institution at the outset, it grew into an instrument of the military aristocracy who at times used it to control the khan.[35] The latest stage of this evolution was reached in the Crimean khanate where the four leading emirs representing the four leading aristocratic families formed a sort of throne council, the khan could not do much without them.[36]

In due course, the great emirs also acquired regional bases. The regional basis of the Dughlat house was in the Tarim basin where they controlled the oasis cities. The Manghit (with Edigü) controlled pasture between the Yaik and the Emba rivers. The Suldus in the Ilkhanate had their grazing grounds in Azerbaijan, and so forth. More regional dynasties can be identified; for instance the Sutai family, hereditary governors of Diyarbakır in Anatolia.[37] A good example for regionalisation is Khurasan: the first Mongol governor there, Arghun Aqa, founded a long line of emirs, and the Khurasanian emirs succeeded in gaining financial autonomy. Khurasan therefore was no longer part of the Ilkhanate in financial matters. In the fights following the death of Abū Saᶜīd, the Khurasanian emirs

[32] Atwood (2006a, 2006b).

[33] Mirgaleev (2016a, 2016b), Reva (2016), Trepavlov (2016a).

[34] Melville (1999), Wing (2016).

[35] Schamiloglu (1984), Collins (1991), Hope (2017), Trepavlov (2016c).

[36] Schamiloglu (1984), Atwood (2006a).

[37] Melville (1999), Paul (2011a).

agreed on their own candidate in a special *quriltay*.[38] Thus the path was set for the emergence of regional states.

Another important factor for fission comes from the regular army. The Mongol armies (both the guard and the regular army) were organised according to the decimal system, following old precedent on the steppe. The decimal system strengthened the khan in the short run, since it was designed to prevent horizontal links and stressed the vertical ones instead,[39] but at the same time, it was prone to produce fission. The basic unit was the thousand. These units not only had hereditary members, but also hereditary commanders. Once the thousands were assigned particular regions—as pasture, as region from which to derive revenue—this meant that regional states were bound to appear. This is what happened in the Chaghatay Khanate, western half, after the takeover of the Qara'unas emirs: a dozen or so regional states emerged, some of which can be proved to have their roots in earlier thousands.[40] One of those were the Barlas or Barulas, centred around Kish, the group from which Temür originated.[41] It is thus the heredity of positions in the military that led to fragmentation.

9 Redistribution Mechanisms

The competition between military leaders, including princes of the royal house, was boosted by the decrease in available revenue. Nomad states tend to be built around a redistribution mechanism: the khan has to distribute all accruing revenue, booty as well as tax income, to his family and retainers. In both Iranian and Turko-Mongol understanding, through loyal service, retainers earn a right to an increase in the shares to which they are entitled. This creates an instable situation already in a mid-term perspective: recognised claims to a share tend to grow so much that they cannot possibly all be met. Competition is the inevitable result. This competition is bound to be stronger as soon as revenue decreases, when booty is no longer made and tax income drops.[42]

The Mongol empire as a whole expanded even after the first stage of the fission processes had been completed.[43] We can conveniently date the end of expansion to 1279 when the Southern Song were conquered. After that, raiding continued in the East and elsewhere, but substantial territorial gains were no longer made. The Yuan stopped attempts at Japan and made no further progress in Indochina, either. The Golden Horde

[38] Aubin (1976, 1991), Paul (2011b); for Arghun Aqa: Lane (1979), Wing (2016), Aubin (1995), Landa (2018), Broadbridge (2016) for the marital ties which went with this career.

[39] As is well known, it was strictly forbidden to leave one's unit and join another one.

[40] Munkh-Erdene (2016), Manz (1989).

[41] Manz (1989), Grupper (1992–4).

[42] Paul (2003–2004).

[43] Morgan (2009).

continued raiding in Eastern Europe, but did not conquer any more regions and soon began to recede on its European borders. The Ilkhanate had come to a first tacit, later not so tacit agreement with the Mamluks that the border between both realms would roughly run along the Euphrates. The Chaghatay Khanate, hemmed in as it was between the other khanates, could have expanded only into India, but had to restrict its activities to some raiding. Most of the military activities in the Mongol sphere after 1260 and in particular after 1280 was due to war between khanates. Even though we do not have figures, it is clear that income from booty was much lower than in the phase of original expansion.

We do not have tax figures, either, but we can be sure about the general situation. The Ilkhanate—or should we say the bureaucratic party in the Ilkhanate leadership—struggled to achieve some kind of regularised taxation; it was successful in this endeavour to a certain extent and for some periods. But it is sure that the incoming revenue was not nearly enough to satisfy the recognised claims of the military aristocracy. Moreover, the Ilkhans had alienated much of the tax income in a more or less direct way, empowering military aristocrats to raise revenue themselves. This contributed directly to the process of regionalisation and fission on the one hand, but it also led to a further decrease in the amounts of revenue available for redistribution. Due to the much weaker source basis for the two remaining western khanates, we can only assume that on the whole, the result was comparable: the khans disposed of less and less means to keep the redistribution process going. And there is a kind of general rule from which the Mongol empire was no exception: in case the central ruler is unable to satisfy the recognised claims of the main emirs and retainers, these will seek to gain access to sources of revenue independently of the redistribution mechanism in the centre; they have to do so because they too are obliged to serve the recognised claims of their own retainers. This means that the main emirs will seek to monopolise their grip on revenues accruing from certain regions. This evidently will boost fission processes.

10 Differences

The Ilkhanate, as Morgan observed, was the first of the successor states to meet its end, China came next. Morgan asks whether this should be seen as a coincidence, and of course opts for the negative. Is it possible to link this observation to the fact that in both these sedentary countries, the Mongol conquerors had been subject to a process of acculturation? And is the Mongol performance in both countries—roughly a century or a century and a half in China (depending on the regions and on how one counts), eighty years or a bit more than a century in Iran (again depending on the region)—a failure or an achievement? Is both attributable to too much or too little acculturation? One of the essential points seems to be Mongol ability to stay militarily superior. This could only be achieved in countries where the Mongol (nomadic) way of life could be upheld. In China, that was not the case at all, in Iran conditions were a bit better. But it is no coincidence that the two khanates which were centred on steppe regions both survived for the longest period of time.

It is true that Chinggisid legitimation—the idea that rulership was vested in the descendants of Chinggis Khan—was most resilient in the steppe. It stopped to be of much relevance in Iran a generation or two after the demise of the Ilkhanate whereas in the Chaghatay realm and in the regions of the Golden Horde, it was decisive down to the eighteenth century, and many rulers, even regional and local ones, indeed were Chinggisids. Does this mean that the idea of a charismatic ruling house is more typical of the steppe than it is of the sedentary cultures of Iran and China? Morgan says yes, but it seems to me that the question deserves further analysis.[44] This paper has argued that while China and Iran both are predominantly sedentary economies (China nearly exclusively so), and while this certainly is a common feature and may account for difficulties which the Mongols had in staying militarily superior, there also are differences between the two, and indeed between China and the rest of the Mongol world: China did not undergo fission processes whereas all other khanates did. In my view, this difference cannot be linked to the nomad-sedentary dichotomy, and not to the degree of acculturation, either. It is beyond my competence to discuss questions involving China, and therefore I have to leave the question open.

11 Conclusion

It is only recently that research on the Mongol empire has started to be conducted in a comparative perspective, taking the entire Mongol space into account.[45] In this paper, I have tried to adopt this perspective in showing commonalities between the three western khanates.[46] As a result, I think that a case can be made for fission processes as the major dynamics behind the end of first the unitary empire and then all three khanates. Fission in turn seems to go back to common causes in all three khanates, but the thoroughness and the speed in which Chinggisid rule and legitimation ended depended on individual factors. Fission processes produced large numbers of regional states in all three western khanates, and in some cases, the fission process can be observed down to the local level.

Fission processes could be linked to essential developments within the ruling circle, the household and immediate retainers of the ruler, in particular the guard corps *keshig*. Heredity of positions within the *keshig*, but also in the regular army, also could be made accountable for boosting fission. In the last resort, the redistribution mechanisms around which nomad empires tended to be constructed also contributed to fission processes as soon as resources at the disposal of the central ruler shrank and the recognised claims of family

[44] Morgan (2009).

[45] Biran (2013) rightly underlines the significance of Allsen's work (she sees Allsen 2001b as a watershed), but I want to add Ostrowski (1998) as an earlier attempt.

[46] Peter Jackson has published an excellent study on Islamisation in these three khanates (Jackson 2017). He does not touch the final stages of any of these, and his focus is heavily on Iran. This work offers the most extensive bibliography on the question today.

and retainers could no longer be served. It is important to note that all these factors, including the heredity of positions, should not be seen as signs of "decline". Heredity was a principle from the start, including the periods of conquest and expansion.

The analysis in this paper concentrated on the second stage of fission which concerned the successor states. At first, they formed a common Mongol space to the point that they have been seen as a "meta-empire". Even taken as individual states, however, they qualify as empires given their territorial size, their military might, their heterogeneity in terms of population, economic pursuits, and religious and cultural affiliation, and their legitimising narrative which involved claims to universal rule. It is only when they broke up in turn and regional states emerged that the Mongol Empire was really gone even though in some regions, and on the Eurasian steppe in particular, Chinggisid legitimacy continued to be of prime importance.

Fission is proposed in this paper as a way of describing the end of the Mongol Empire and its western successor states as an alternative for the "decline and fall" paradigm. I believe it offers a number of advantages: above all, it seems possible to explain fission in social and political terms, to describe it in these terms, and to do this in a comparative perspective, whereas "decline" is rather vague as a metaphor and does not lend itself easily to inter-state or inter-empire comparison. "Fall", in the case of some at least of the Mongol successor states, seems to imply a too sudden and too violent end; where regional and local states subsisted within the Chinggisid paradigm, speaking of "fall" means stretching the evidence: these states did not fall but transited into smaller units which do not qualify as empires in our analytical framework.

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The End of the Timurid Empire

Bert G. Fragner

Considering "the end of the Timurid Empire" makes it inevitable to remind us of a temporarily returning debate whether the realm of the Timurid dynasty (i.e., a series of ruling descendants of the famous Central Asian conqueror Timur—Tamerlan, Tamburlaine, Timurlenk etc.—who died 1405) having ruled from the early fifteenth until the early sixteenth centuries in parts of the Iranian Plateau and of Central Asia is, in retrospective, actually to be recognized as an "empire"? There is, at least, no doubt about the fact that this political entity has come to an end roughly about 1510.

Anyway: The so-called "Great Mughals" have definitely shaped an empire in the Indo-Pakistani Subcontinent by (from 1526 onward) appealing strongly to their "Timurid" descent.[1] One may even put a question mark after this statement concerning the Timurids' end of rule—shouldn't we rather perceive the reign of the Mughals in India as something like a revitalized "Timurid Empire"? I'll stop immediately this maybe over-sophisticated consideration and come back to generally accepted facts—end of Timurid rule in Herât and Samarqand about 1510 or even before, and rise of the Mughal empire 1526 (the battle of Panipat; see below), disregarding the fact that its founder belonged to the house of Timur.

The Central Asian14th century conqueror Timur had shaped an "empire", probably in the proper sense of the term, between the years 1370 and 1405 (the year of his death). Having originated from the political frame of the Chinggisid so-called *ulus* of Chaghatay (from 1227 onward), Timur started his venture in the city of Shahr-i sabz in today's Uzbekistan, and extended his rule over Samarqand in "Mâ varâ an-nahr" (Transoxiana)

[1] Cf. the contribution by Stephan Popp in this volume.

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which became in due course his stable home-base for his rapidly expanding empire. During the 35 years of his imperial rule, he stretched his power from Transoxiana into the Eastern Iranian Province of Khorâsân the centre of which was, at that time, regarded to be the city of Herât in today's Afghanistan. Khorâsân had been a permanent matter of dispute between the former Iranian Ilkhâns and the Chaghatayids (both of Chinggisid descent), and these disputes continued even after the breakdown of Chinggisid power in general. The areas around lake Aral—the ancient province of Khorazm—had been also exposed to Chaghatyid claims but not against the Ilkhans but against the also Chinggisid *ulus* Juchi, better known as the lands of the Golden Horde located mainly on Russian soil. After having successfully conquered these three adjacent territories (Transoxiana, Khorazm and Khorâsân which he considered as his basic heart-lands) Timur expanded into Central and Western Iran, Caucasia, Mesopotamia and Syria. Furthermore, he conquered large parts of the Golden Horde where he besieged the city of Samara (1391) and, in further campaigns, Astrakhan, Bolghar, the river Terek, the Crimean peninsula and, above all, the political centre of the Golden Horde, the city of Saray at the lower river Volga. Eventually his troops approached even the shores of river Dn'estr in Ukraine. As a result of these campaigns, the formerly strong Juchid Khan Tokhtamish's rule was broken, and the Golden Horde disintegrated gradually.

In Anatolia, Timur defeated the Ottoman Sultan Beyazid in the battle of Ankara (1402). Only three years later, at the eve of a largely and meticulously planned campaign against China, his further plans were stopped just by his death (1405).

One might have expected that these conquests and campaigns may have laid the base for an empire run by his successors—the so-called "Timurids", but: not really! Timur had not taken serious measures to regulate his political succession. On the contrary: during his life-time, his main goal was to dispute the problem of minimizing the deficiency of his lacking family relationship with the house of the Chinggisids. Having not been of immediate Chinggisid descent himself, he aimed to get publicly perceived in a position as close as possible to the Chaghatay line of the Chinggisids. Due to this reason, he never had been able to obtain the title of "Khan"—which was at that time exclusively reserved for individuals of immediate Chinggisid origin. Based on repeated acts of marriage to various Chinggisid princesses, he appointed himself to the surrogate position of a "son-in-law"—a "güräkän" (a Turkic word, Persian spelling: "Gûrkân")—of a Khan, thus presenting himself as "something almost similar to a Khan".

In courteous and ceremonial contexts, he was officially called "Amir" (a "military leader"). His sons and subsequently his descendants were in accordance with this title called "Amir-zâde" ("the Amir's sons") abbreviated to "Mir-zâde" or simply to "Mirzâ"—the Timurids' typical and characteristic dynastic title to be put after the proper name—thus Timur's first successor was officially named "Shâh-Rokh-Mirzâ", his son (Timur's grand-son) "Ulugh-Beg-Mirzâ", and so on. It is significant that all these Timurids did not refer to their house as "Timuri" (i.e. Timurid) but preferred the term "Gurkâni"—an obvious reflex on the particular value their ancestor had paid to this self-denomination of his. Even to

them, the definition of their non-Chinggisid, but "almost-Chinggisid" status has been a matter of priority.[2]

Within less than one generation, the vast territorial extension of Timur's imperial power was not anymore resembled by the realm of his successors. The territory of their reign shrunk in due course. When Timur's son Shâh-Rokh died in 1447, his factual imperial territory consisted of his main area Khorâsân (with its capital Herât), Transoxiana and Khorazm, and also some parts of central and Southern Iran. In comparison to his father's territory; his political and topographic presence did not anymore reach Âzarbâyjân, Western Iran, Mesopotamia, Syria, Caucasia and Central and Eastern Anatolia. Internal Timurid rivalry and animosity were playing a strong role in all these losses.

The main factor was the rise of an Anatolian and Âzerbâyjâni tribal federation of Turkomans and their strong military potential, named the Qara-Qoyunlu movement, later on succeeded by the so-called Aq-Qoyunlu federation. Due to these forces Timurid power had been totally prohibited to return to these areas (western Iran, Anatolia, northern Iraq and northern Syria) already much earlier than 1450!

Most of these non-Timurid rulers and dynasties in the Western parts of Iran perceived themselves rather as legitimate successors to the vanished Il-Khans than to Timur—this goes particularly for the Qara-Qoyunlu and the Aq-Qoyunlu rulers in eastern Anatolia and in western Iran/Âzarbâyjân and the territory of ancient Media ("'Erâq-e 'ajam", the so-called "Persian "Iraq"), and even, in the sixteenth century, also for the Safavids. They followed the Il-Khanid tradition of perceiving the Âzarbâjânî city Tabriz as the metropolitan capital of Iran, and whenever they had conquered Tabrîz they declared themselves immediately as "pâdeshâh-e Îrân" or "kesrâ-ye Îrân"—the "kings of Iran", and they also adhered to a minting system which was based on the unit of the "dînâr-e tabrîzî" (or "dînâr-e 'erâqî") to be immediately derived from the Il-Khanid "dînâr" which was in fact not anymore based on any Islamic traditions but rather on Chinese tradition—in a structural sense although not by denomination.

Timur had broken with this Il-Khanid tradition and invented a new unit of currency, probably of Indian origin: the so-called "Tanga". Nevertheless, there is a strange aspect in this development: Still under the Qara-Qoyunlu leaders, a silver-coin was in wide-spread use in western territories which was very popular—probably because of its reliable silver-standard: a "tanga" popularly named "shâhrokhî" referring to Shâh-Rokh's name having been centrally visible struck on this coin. In due course, down to the end of the 15th cenury the standards of the "tanga" and the "dînâr-e tabrîzî" were unified in the western lands—and under the early Safavids the only surviving standard remained the "dînâr".[3]

Another surprising moment can be found on original royal fermâns (decrees) which were promulgated by Qara-Qoyunlu, Aq-Qoyunlu, and Safavid rulers throughout the 15th

[2] Nagel (1993), Roemer (2003), Manz (1983: 79–100).

[3] Hinz (1969: 90–95).

and in the early 16th centuries: Following the model of Timur himself they used in their "intitulation" the formula "sözümiz" ("a word of Ours"") in order to indicate the royal character of the document—just in the same way Timurid princes used to do at the same time. But this was not at all due to any specific respect paid by the western rulers to any idea of Timurid supremacy; they simply referred to the model of Timur himself in order to underline their own strength and importance.[4]

In his central area—Khorâsân, Transoxiana and at that time still including Khorazm in the North-West—Shâh-Rokh had reigned something like a double-faced condominium together with his son Ulugh-Beg since 1409. While Shâh-Rokh resided officially in Herât, Ulugh-Beg maintained his residential centre in Samarqand.[5] Ulugh-Beg survived his father only for a period of two years, due to an uprising in which his own favorite son Abdu l-Latîf had been involved, immediately after Ulugh-Beg had transferred the mortal remnants of his father Shah-Rokh from Herât to Samarqand. Practically, Timurid rule was cut into separate halves, at the latest, officially from 1450 onward: Khorâsân (capital: Herât) in the south, and Transoxiana (together with Khorazm) in the north (capital: Samarqand).

In the middle of the fifteenth century, i.e. about 1450, the Qara-Qoyunlu rulers had successfully taken over western Iran having approached the meridian of Esfahân or Yazd and even beyond, from the west, and also the Iranian south, their residential capital having been Tabriz. For a very short phase, Qara-Qoyunlu fighters were even in a potential situation to endanger the Timurid position in Herât! This proves the fact that any claim for Timurid supremacy over the territory of the Turkoman federations in the west had lost its value totally much earlier than in the middle of the fifteenth century.

The Timurid rulers in the northern territory, i. e., the overlords of Samarqand, were, at the same time, facing another maybe even more aggressive challenge than the western Iranian Qara-Qoyunlu, and after them the Aq-Qoyunlu federations. As early as 1428, another Chinggisid prince, a certain Abu'l-Khayr Khân (a descendant of an earlier Khân of the Golden Horde named Shiban or Shaybân) unified a tribal federation consisting of a number of fighting units from the decreasing Golden Horde, the so-called Uzbeks, in Central Asia, coming down to Lake Aral and the Syr-Darya-region from the southern Volga area. Abu'l-Khayr Khân has been and is still generally accepted as the founder of the so-called Shaybânid dynasty. As the undisputed leader of the Uzbeks, he had opposed heavily Timurid sovereignty over Khorazm (having always been claimed by the Golden Horde against Chaghatayids and also against Timur himself). After 1450, Abu'l-Khayr Khân supported a Timurid prince residing in Samarqand (a certain 'Abu Sa'id) who had fought heavily against his own nephew for gaining power in Transoxiana.

Anyway: When Abu'l-Khayr Khân died in 1468, his Uzbek armies had already firmly occupied the whole Syr-Darya region (i.e. northern Transoxiana) and Khorazm. Remaining

[4] Fragner (1992: 84–113, 1999: 282–295).

[5] Bartol'd (1935).

Timurid areas consisted of the central and eastern parts of Transoxiania and Khorâsân—nothong more! At that moment, Abu'l-Khayr Khân's military fortune appeared to be interrupted. He had found his death fighting another tribal unit, the so-called Qazakhs, forerunners of today's Kazakhstan's state-nation, who had collectively left the Uzbek federation. Anyway, a grand-son of Abu'l-Khayr, a certain Muhammad Shaybânî Khân, re-organized Uzbek power in Transoxiana: having functioned initially as an ally to various rivaling Timurid local princes and even to remote Chaghatay Khâns in that area, he succeeded eventually in taking over supremacy in that part of the Timurid territories: From the years 1500 and 1501 onward he possessed the cities of Samarqand and Bukhara, former political strongholds of Timurid princes, for good, and he appeared as the real ruler not only of Khorazm in the north-west but of the whole of Transoxiana.

What did, at the same time, happen in Western, Central and Southern Iran? In Eastern Anatolia, a rivaling Turkoman federation to the Qara-Qoyunlu had come into existence: the Aq-Qoyunlu. Their beginning dated back to the thirties of the fifteenth century, but it was mainly due to the virtues of the famous Aq-Qoyunlu leader Uzun Hasan (the "long" Hasan, having ruled his federation from 1453 until 1478) that his tribes could overrun successfully the Qara-Qoyunlus. This means that from the seventies onward, the realm of the Qara-Qoyunlu had been passed to their intimate enemies and successors, the Aq-Qoyunlu. As a consequence of this development, Uzun Hasan and likewise his successors possessed the ancient and former Il-Khânid residence Tabriz—and thus not only the capital of the important province of Âzarbâyjân but a symbol for supremacy all over Iran, at least in the former and traditional Il-Khânid meaning of this term. In due course, Âzarbâyjân, Western and Central Iran and eventually southern Iran would have been due to Aq-Qoyunlu supremacy—if there had not other additional, and absolutely unexpected players appeared in this region of West Asia, emerging just one decade after the political heydays of Uzun Hasan: They were successors and descendants of a charismatic Sufi-leader who had lived in the first third of the fourteenth century—a certain Sheykh Safî od-dîn who had been topographically based in the vicinity of the Âzarbâyjânî city of Ardabîl not too far from Tabriz. Under his successors, a very powerful and, in the proper sense, rich Sufi order came into existence, named after its eponymos: the so-called "Safaviyya". The order's adherents were from the same social origins as the Qara-Qoyunlu and Aq-Qoyunlu federations had been: mainly Turkoman tribes in Eastern Anatolia (at that time not yet under Ottoman sway), and in Western Iran and particularly in Âzarbâyjân. Around the 1450s this mystic order acquired a strong and radical Shi'ite shade; the spiritual leaders, all of them from a quasi-monarchic common descent, perceived themselves as immediate incarnations of Ali and ascribed to themselves divine origin. They appealed to their adherents for fighting in favour of something like a Kingdom of God and were thus in a situation to create a strongly motivated and effective military force. In the year 1501/02 these Sufi fighters defeated the Aq-Qoyunlus, and their just fourteen years old charismatic "divine" leader, Shâh Esmâ'îl, took over the worldly power over the greater part of Iran except Khorâsân, then still ruled by one of the most fabulous Herât based Timurid princes, Husayn Mîrzâ Bâyqâra. After his death in 1506, Muhammad Shaybânî's Uzbeks overran

Herât. Esmâ'îl, the young and new Safavid "Shâh", declared war on Muhammad Shaybânî under the pretext to support Mîrzâ Husayn's son Badi'o'z-zamân in order to regain Herât for him—in fact he conquered Herât in order to incorporate the Khorâsânian rest of the Timurid empire in favour of Safavid power (1510).

There had just remained one Timurid prince of minor significance originating from a place named Andijân, located in the Ferghana valley. Later on, this person became famous under the name Zahîru d-din Bâbur.

After 1510 the political situation in the territories which once had been ruled by princes of Timurid origin was as follows: Shaybânid rulers and their Uzbek fighters ruled over Khorazm, Transoxiana and the Ferghana valley. Shaybânid claims for supremacy in Khorâsân remained to be maintained until the late sixteenth century but were scarcely put into effect. In fact, Khorâsân was gradually integrated into the territorial substance of Safavid Iran, at the latest during the second decade of the sixteenth century. The only political power of Timurid origin, in that time, appeared in the personality of the already mentioned Bâbur who, rather a brigand than a military leader together with his combatants, crusaded through the Hindukush mountain ranges, and descended eventually after 1525 down into the swamps of the Indus valley where he defeated the troops of the Sultan of Delhi in a battle near to the city of Panipat, i.e. on Indian soil. This should have been the starting signal for the coming into existence of another political entity, the empire of the Mughals, ruled by descendants of Zahîru d-dîn Bâbur. Their dynasty is to be characterized by descent from their ancestor Timur as well as the Timurids proper, and their realm maybe regarded as a "new" or "secondary" Timurid empire, may be in fact the only one which really deserves the denomination "empire", in comparison with the Timurid "would-be empire" which I have tried to describe by some quick strokes just now.[6] But this is, in accordance with Rudyard Kipling's "Jungle Books", "another story".

Talking about the so-called Timurid "Empire" termed roughly to the fifteenth century, means to talk about different areal and territorial components: Âzarbâyjân and the Caucasus, not to forget Eastern Anatolia, have their places in this talk and, moreover Southern and Central Iran as well. Timurid princes themselves—from Shâh-Rokh through Mîrzâ Husayn Bâyqarâ—did never reign over these territories. By the way, we need to differentiate between "Timur" and the "Timurids": Timur himself was definitely not a "Timurid"; it goes without saying that the Timurids' realm emerged from Timur's empire, but his own empire did actually not survive the life-time of its founder.

The historical region of Khorâsân, today covering territories of at least three states (Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan) was one of the two most eminent topographic parts of Timurid rule, but after Shâh-Rukh's death the Herâti Timurids did not wield any real power over the Transoxanian areas, nor did the Samarqandi Timurids rule factually over Khorâsân. From the Iranian (Khorâsânî) side, (Herâti) Timurid power had been challenged, at the latest, since the early Twenties by the rising Qara-Qoyunlu from the West, and after

[6] Cf. now Manz (2020).

them by their political successors, the Aq-Qoyunlu and the early Safavids who appear in our view as the real political heirs of Timurid power in Khorâsân, in the run of the sixteenth century.

At this point it may deserve to perceive, once more, the Timurids' territorial problems by means of a "regionalist" approach to the history of Central Asia, Transoxiana and the Iranian Plateau. This may help us to understand properly their strategic concepts.[7]

Since the heydays of the Sasanian empire (third until seventh centuries A.D.) a large eastern region coined general mental mapping concepts of that period, also through early Islamic times (and in many centuries later): the region of Khorâsân. As its main cities were perceived Nishâpur, Marv, Harât and Balkh. This makes clear that historical Khorâsân covered parts of territories of the present states of Iran, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. Originally, the Amu-Daryâ was perceived as the north-eastern border-line of Khorâsân. Pre- and early Islamic "Sogdia" (Transoxiana) was perceived as a territory of its own, nothing to say about Khorazm around the Amu-Daryâ-delta and the shores of Lake Aral. With the rise of the Islamic Caliphate—the Damascus-based Omayyads and the Abbasids, residing in Baghdad—Transoxiana was included into the Caliphate as "Mâ varâ an-nahr" ("what is beyond the river") thus having been perceived as an immediate extension of Khorâsân. In a caliphal perspective the Oxus (Amu-Daryâ) was not anymore seen as a separating river but as a connecting line, between Khorâsân proper and Ma varâ an-nahr (Transoxiana).

This view changed in due course with the establishment of the Mongol (Chinggisid) Empire. The rulers of the Chinggisid Ilkhanate on Iranian soil visualized their realm as consisting of Western Iran including Azerbâyjaân (ancient Media), Southern and Central Iran and, in the East, Khorâsân. Their neighbouring cousins, the Chinggisid Khâns of "Chaghatây", perceived themselves as the rulers of Transoxiana and today's Xinjiang (in China). In addition to that, the Chaghatâyids laid also claims on Khorâsân (thus challenging the Chinggisid Il-Khâns) and Khorazm which was actually ruled by the also Chinggisid Khâns of the Golden Horde ("Ulus Juchi", based along the Volga river). Territorial legitimacy, in these areas, had come into existence as an internal all-Chinggisid world-view, and survived the political existence of Chinggisid power throughout centuries.

It was one of the territorial achievements of Timur to have put Chaghatâyid aspirations into reality: he brought Transoxiana together with Khorâsân and Khorazm into a homogenous and single territorial unit, under his rule. These three territories shaped exactly Timur's "homeland". In addition to that, he had also conquered other parts of the Il-Khânid lands, i.e. southern and particularly western Iran with its center Tabriz which had been transformed to the Il-Khanid capital, in the thirteenth century. Anyway: in comparison to earlier concepts, Timur's perception of territory contained a certain aspect of "all-Chinggisid revisionism": He refrained from Eastern Turkestan beyond the Tienshan mountains (having been claimed by the Chaghatay Khans) but he integrated Khorâsân

[7] Fragner (2001: 341–354).

(from Il-Khânid Iran) and Khorazm (from the Golden Horde) into his empire. All his other territories were additive: Syria, Palestine, Anatolia and parts of southern Russia were, to Timur, not "homeland" but extended conquered territory. It deserves to have in mind that his successor—Shâh-Rokh—never succeeded in keeping these extended territories under his rule. His and his successors' realm consisted only and exclusively of these "homeland" areas. This means that in the pass-over from Timur to Shâh-Rokh the Timurids lost by far more than fifty percent of the soil which had been under Timur's command less than one generation earlier.

From the north-west, the Timurids were confronted with a permanent threat from the Golden Horde (i.e., from the side of Russia); peoples from the Golden Horde claimed for regaining of and revenge for Khorazm—the Shaybânî Khâns, originating from the Golden Horde and leading their tribal federation named "Uzbeks". They extinguished in the second half of the fifteenth century Timurid rule in Transoxiana in two steps—first by the early Abu l-Khayr Khân, and about 1500 by Muhammad Shaybanî Khân. The "Uzbeks" successfully got back Khorazm, and until the early sixteenth century they conquered the whole of Transoxiana, on expense of the Timurids.

Subsequently there is almost no indication for any kind of further territorial expansion throughout Timurid political dominance, not even any sign for any intention from their side to expand, during the whole fifteenth century! Since the ascendance of Shâh-Rokh to the throne disputes and rumors about the leading position of the whole system did not come anymore to any end. After 1450 the situation calmed down in the Khorâsâni part, but could have been managed much less effective in Transoxania despite of Abu Sa'id's temporary political success in maintaining something like stability (1451–1468). In this area, the struggle for power was mainly and permanently coined by enduring intrafamiliar animosity and rivalry.

Can we therefore come to the result that talking about a "Timurid empire" might have been nothing than talking about something like a "myth"? There is one point—maybe even a decisive one—which may prohibit me from such a strict statement.

First of all: the Timurids were obviously absolutely gifted and talented networkers. Representatives of Timurid courts were to be found everywhere in what we call today the MENA region, and even beyond: They were present on Indian soil, in Central Asia, and in the West even deep in Anatolia and even at the centers of Ottoman power, maybe with the exception of the centers of Mamluk Egypt. This was to a lesser extent caused by any immediate diplomatic activities and abilities but surprisingly by an unexpected virtue: culture and theatrality. It was particularly in the courteous ambiences of Herât, where within only a few couple of decades an impressive tradition of courteous and fashionable culture had come into existence among their élites which did contribute to an almost legendary fame of Timurid refined upper class culture among the leading cultural and political élites in the whole Middle East. Ottomans, Delhi Sultans, Qara-Qoyunlu and Aq-Qoyunlu princes, South Iranian local rulers, ruling houses in Syria and Northern Mesopotamia, all over Central Asia until deep into Chinese territory competed with each other in copying successfully Timurid cultural, representative and ceremonial manners. For a period of at least three generations there was not any doubt that Herât was praised as the "hot spot" of Persophone poetry and literature, from the Ottoman lands until deep into India

and into the steppes of Central Asia.[8] Within a short time, under Timurid protection also a new linguistic style of Turkic poetry and literature came into existence, at that time esteemed on the same level of reception as Ottoman literature: so-called classical Chaghatay Turkic literature and (standardized) literary language. Following this success in the field of literature, the art of the book found extreme response among the West and Central Asian élites, and even beyond. The artistic mastering of the art of miniature painting surpassed every rivaling attempt to develop comparable standards during that time. Another aspect of Fine Art in representation and theatrality was—and is—architecture. Timurid architecture contributed heavily to the Timurids' incredible fame as leading cultural "role-models" of their time, within a widely extended super-region. This is not the place to refer to every single item of their importance in artistic terms. I refrain therefore from pointing even only to very few most important examples of Timurid art. Allow me just to refer to the fact that with international auction houses there is scarcely anything to be found within the category of "Islamic Art" which could be put on the same level with "Timurid Art".[9]

It would be too much speculation to confine oneself to these artistic and cultural affairs in a monocausal way in order to explain the high reputation Timurid culture is even nowadays paid to. But there might be something interesting about the matter that Timurids were in a situation to refrain partly from military and political engagements by replacing this kind of activities by concentrating rather on esthetic affairs. They were not at all good in managing political preconditions for general safety in their territories. But they profited a lot from transcontinental silk-road continental commerce which was obviously still abundant and highly active during the fifteenth century. Hundred years later, there is much evidence of decline, in this matter, among others, due to the rise of maritime commercial affairs.

Let us now address the crucial question concerning the reasons for the decline and subsequently for the end of Timurid rule? When, in the early fifteenth century, various Timurid princes, most of them Timur's physical sons, strove in vain for supremacy within the territories of their late father's empire, and when, after roughly ten years, Shâh-Rukh was eventually in a situation to win all these attempts, they had already initiated the final phase of their "Timurid empire" in a moment when this empire had not yet been actually established. To put it in another wording: The beginning of the Timurid empire somehow coincided with its own fragmentation! Nevertheless, one must confess: What a glorious decline from its earliest steps toward its abrupt end! Whether looking on the metropolitan sites Samarqand and Herât, on Timurid artistic and architectural remnants all over Iran, Central Asia and partly in Afghanistan and other areas, or taking into account masterpieces of painting and calligraphy or literary climaxes in poetry and epic literature—a gigantic manifestation of glorious imperial decline, even if there may have not existed anything else "imperial Timurid" before this downturn.

[8] Bartol'd (1938); Fragner (2015).

[9] Lentz and Lowry (1989).

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Part III

Africa, Asia, China

The Decline and Collapse of the Kingdom of Aksum (6th-7th CE): An Environmental Disaster or the End of a Political Process?

Gianfrancesco Lusini

Though the origins of the ancient African state having Aksum as its capital city are still a matter of debate, the outcomes of the archaeological researches inform us that the town started to grow at least from the fourth cent. BC. and that in about three hundred years the kingdom developed into a regional power controlling the highlands of Eritrea and Tigray (Northern Ethiopia). From a Greek source like the anonymous seafarers' guide known as *Periplus of the Eritrean Sea* (§§ 4–5), composed in the decade 60–70, we learn that in the second half of the first cent. AD the town and the surrounding territory were in a prosperous condition, being a crossroads for trading in the Red Sea, along the maritime route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean.[1] The African capital city is found at the center of Tigray highlands, in a position relatively far from the coast, but its economy and wealth are a consequence of the close connection with the port of Adulis,[2] qualified by the same *Periplus* as ἐμπόριον νὸμιμον, 'legally limited port',[3] or—according to the modern language—'port of trade'. From the end of the third cent. AD, when Aksum begins to coin money, the African kingdom establishes a stable and friendly relationship with Rome, until forming a *de facto* political 'alliance' (φιλία, *amicitia*) with its emperors.[4]

[1] Sidebotham (2009, 2012), Howard-Johnston (2017).

[2] Zazzaro (2013), Speidel (2015: 94–101), Anfray (2016), Giostra and Massa (2016), Nappo (2018: 142–145).

[3] Casson (1989: 50–51, 274–276).

[4] Most probably, in specific circumstances, agreements and treaties of political friendship must have reinforced such alliance between Rome and Aksum. As pointed out by Speidel (2015: 119):

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Starting at least from the fourth cent. AD, the Aksumite rulers laid the foundation of a sacred kingship,[5] proclaiming themselves as 'sons' of a war god of South-Arabian origins named Maḥrəm[6] (the Greek Ares). The sovereign's deification is noticeable in the monumental size of the Aksumite architectures, from palaces to burials, to whom stelae are connected as indicators of the graves and representations of the heavenly king's dwelling, shaped upon his material abode. However, at least from the first quarter of the third cent. AD, the kings of Aksum adopted a title by which they wanted to differentiate themselves from other coeval monarchies, particularly those of South Arabia, ruling over societies based on clans and tribes. Thus, in Sabaic epigraphic records (*CIH* 308[7] and *Ja* 631[8]), the Aksumite king Gadar(at) styles himself *mlk ḥbšt* 'king of Ethiopia' (*CIH* 308 from Riyām) or *mlk ḥbšt w'ksmn* 'king of Ethiopia and of the Aksumites' (*Ja* 631 from the sanctuary 'Awām in Mārib). Yet, in the so-called bronze 'scepter' of 'Addi Gälämo[9] (the most ancient Gə'əz royal inscription known to us) the same king bears the title of *ngśy 'ksm* (*RIÉ* 180[10]). The development of *ngśy* in contrast to the ESA[11] *mlk* (a word of Semitic origin

«although the details of these agreements remain unknown, the concept of *amicitia* (political friendship) apparently played an important role, much as it already had in Roman economic foreign relations in the earliest treaties between Rome and Carthage».

[5] Conti Rossini (1947–48), Caquot (1957).

[6] The transliteration system adopted here for Ethiopian personal and geographic names is the same used by the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (Hamburg University). Therefore, the seven vocalic orders are *ä* (I), *u* (II), *i* (III), *a* (IV), *e* (V), *ə* (VI) and *o* (VII).

[7] From 1889 to 1832 the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres of Paris kept opened a fourth section of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* to publish there all the edited inscriptions in South-Arabian languages, commonly known as *Corpus Inscriptionum Himyariticarum*. The epigraphic texts gathered in such volumes are indicated by the abbreviation *CIH* followed by a progressive number.

[8] In 1962 Albert Jamme, the epigraphist of the archaeological expedition supported by the American Foundation for the Study of Man in the 1950s (directed by Wendell Phillips), published in a volume the hundreds of dedicatory inscriptions in South-Arabian language found in Mārib, the capital city of the Kingdom of Saba' (Avanzini 2016: 34–35). The epigraphic texts he published are indicated by the abbreviation *Ja* followed by a progressive number.

[9] 'Addi Gälämo, in the region of Aṣbi and Där'a (Tigray), east of the 'Addigrat-Mäqälä road, is one of the most important archeological sites documenting the pre-Axumite Period (8th–seventh cent. BC). Particularly, the votive deposit found in the mid-1950s proved to contain a significant sample of objects tracing back to the Ethio-Sabean cultural and historical phase, including the scepter of the third century king Gadar(at).

[10] The *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite* is a collection of ESA, Greek and Gə'əz inscriptions found or documented in Eritrea and Ethiopia. The work, published between 1991 and 2000, is one of the most important products of the team working for the Mission française d'archéologie of Addis Ababa in the second half of the 20th cent. (Francis Anfray, Étienne Bernand, Abraham Johannes Drews and Roger Schneider). The epigraphic texts are indicated by the abbreviation *RIÉ* followed by a progressive number.

[11] The acronym ESA (Epigraphic South-Arabian)—alternatively ASA (Ancient South-Arabian)—generally indicates the South Semitic languages (and the related epigraphic documentation) used in

already used by the Ethio-Sabean rulers of Da'amat[12]), though this root is attested in Gə'əz[13] too with a strictly religious meaning, possibly reflects more than a lexical variation. Probably, this linguistic choice expresses the awareness of the distance between the Sabeo-Ḥimyarite and the Abyssinian concept of monarchy, and the word *ngśy* contains a reference to the intent of including a plurality of ethnic and linguistic components under a common political rule. From such imperial ambition the characteristic Ethiopic title *nəguśä nägäśt* arose, literally 'king of kings', namely 'king (ruling over) kings', which was already brought by Sembrouthes, the successor of Gadar(at)[14] who signed his unique epigraphic record (*RIÉ* 188) βασιλεὺς ἐκ βασιλέων Ἀξωμειτῶν μέγας Σεμβρούθης.[15]

We find the consequences of this situation in the inscriptions of the following centuries. E.g., 'Ezana (*r.* ca. 330–365) opens *RIÉ* 188 = *DAE* 10[16] carefully listing the components of his state,[17] and therefore he proclaims himself «king of Aksum and of

the pre-Islamic kingdoms flourished in Yemen and Oman before the rise of the political leadership following the religious principles of Qur'ān, and the consequent superimposition of Arabic over the whole peninsula.

[12] The name Da'amat—or Da'əmat—occurs in pre-Aksumite royal inscriptions in Sabaic language to indicate both the Ethio-Sabean community and its territory. The rulers bear the title *mukarrib* of Da'amat and Saba' and style themselves *yg'ḏyn*, possibly a tribal affiliation. The Semitic root *g'z* is the same appearing in the name of the language Gə'əz and in the title *mlkn 'g'zyn* used by the Ethiopian official Abraha in *CIH* 541, dated 543/548 AD (Kropp 1991).

[13] Gə'əz is the South Semitic idiom spoken at least by the ruling class of Aksum, and therefore used as the official language for the epigraphic documentation issued by the royal court. Starting from the end of the first millennium AD, though the everyday use declined, Gə'əz survived as literary and liturgical language among the Christian clergy of post-Aksumite Ethiopia.

[14] Fiaccadori (2004: 106–107), Marrassini (2014: 194–196).

[15] Or «'(the) great(est) king from among the kings of (the) Aksum(ites)', i.e. from among his predecessors: a superlative predicate—so often misunderstood in scholarly literature—that seems to anticipate the later formula βασιλεὺς βασιλέων, *basiléus basiléōn*/Eth. *nəguśä nägäśt*, 'king of kings', i.e. 'king among(st) kings' or 'king par excellence'», as suggested by Fiaccadori (2010: 610*b*). However, the Ethiopian linguistic background of Sembrouthes' self-introduction is reaffirmed by Marrassini (2014: 195): «Si tratta invece, molto probabilmente, di un calco dall'etiopico, dato che questa è anche la costruzione *normale* in geez (sostantivo/aggettivo + *'əm* 'da' + stesso sostantivo/aggettivo) e in tigrino (con *'ənkab*) per esprimere il superlativo relativo».

[16] The *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition* (*DAE*) was the German archaeological and scientific mission financed by Kaiser Wilhelm II and conducted from January to April 1906. The team, guided by the Orientalist Enno Littmann, was including Daniel Krencker, Theodor von Lüpke and Erich Kaschke. In addition to the first survey and text excavation at Aksum, a priceless collection of ESA, Greek and Gə'əz inscriptions found during the mission are published in the last of the four volumes of the mission's report. The epigraphic texts are indicated by the abbreviation *DAE* followed by a progressive number.

[17] Marrassini (2014: 228–230).

Ḥəmer[18] and of Raydān[19] and of Saba'[20] and of Salḥen[21] and of ʔəyāmo[22] and of Bəgā[23] and of Kāsu[24]». Thus, the king responsible for the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Aksumite ruling class (in the decade 340–350) draws a geo-political horizon going from Nubia to Eritrea and from Tigray to South Arabia. Once sketched this state of things, it seems appropriate to apply the notion of 'imperial kingdom' to Aksum too, with reference both to the universal claims of its sovereigns and to the real cultural complexity of the society. From the political point of view, we can argue that the same process of state formation, from the original chiefdom, confined on the Betä Giyorgis hill, up to a 'little kingdom' and finally to a 'regional empire'[25] directing the Red Sea trade route, authorized the development of an 'imperial' attitude of the Aksumite sovereigns. Particularly, along the western front, when 'Ezana, triumphed over Meroe and put an end to its political autonomy, he started to present himself not only as the king of Aksum and Ḥimyar, but also as the sovereign of the 'Ethiopians' (βασιλεὺς Αἰθιόπων, *RIÉ* 270 = *DAE* 4 and *RIÉ* 270*bis*)[26] with a new reference to the whole East-African horizon. When the *nəguśä nägäśt* reached the Eritrean seashore to take control of the Adulis port of trade, and established his garrisons on the Yemenite territory to compete with the king of Ḥimyar within the international political play, he gradually became aware of his 'supra-national' dimensions and duties. From the cultural point of view, this is the possible historical and political background allowing the birth and the growth of the 'messianic' conception of the Aksumite kingship, emblematically expressed in a legendary form in some chapters of

[18] Ḥəmer = Ḥimyar. The fourth cent. Aksumite claim for the political control over the Ḥimyarite territories was more the expression of a desire than a historical fact, though the Ethiopian army had the control of some strategic positions in the Northern provinces of Ǧizān and Naǧrān.

[19] Raydān was the name of the castle of the Ḥimyarite kings.

[20] In the fourth cent. The kingdom of Saba' was no more existing as a political entity, but since the first Ḥimyarite kings originated from inside the Sabean leadership, they used to style themselves «kings of Saba' and ḏu Raydān and Ḥaḍramawt and Yamanat», giving a model to the coeval Aksumite title.

[21] Salḥen was the name of the castle of the Sabean kings.

[22] ʔəyāmo is a geo-political term not yet fully understood. It can refer to the South-Arabian possessions in the Horn of Africa or to the Tihāma, the Yemenite shore of the Red Sea coast, where Aksum tried constantly to maintain its military presence for a better control of the maritime trade route.

[23] Today the Cushitic-speaking Beǧa (the ancient Blemmyes) are living in the lowlands between Eritrea and Sudan.

[24] Kāsu is most probably a geographic reference to the territories of the former Kingdom of Meroe (Nubia, Sudan).

[25] According to a 'processual model' of state formation, as that proposed in Kulke (1986) with reference to the Southeast Asian History. I thank Robert Rollinger for suggesting me to exploit this bibliographic resource.

[26] Marrassini (2014: 19–21).

the 14th cent. *Kəbrä Nägäśt* (*The nobility of the kings*). Being a stratified literary creation,[27] the most popular section of the work is the apocryphal tale concerning the meeting between the Queen of the South Makəddа and the King of Israel Solomon.[28] In its final section (§§ 116–117), possibly derived from original sources dating back to sixth–seventh cent., the religious novel glorifies the 'millenarian' role reserved to the Christian rulers of Aksum and Byzantium[29] and explicitly mentions the two emperors, Kaleb and Justin I, who signed a treaty against the South-Arabian Kingdom of Ḥimyar.[30]

Aksum and Ḥimyar are fighting for the land possession and for the control of trading in the Red Sea. For reasons of strategic equilibrium, Ḥimyar receives support from Sasanian Persia, with the aim of contrasting both the Ethiopian military initiatives and the presence of Byzantium in the region.[31] Around the year 518, during the reign of Justin I, the Nestorian merchant Cosmas (later nick-named 'Indicopleustes') is dwelling in Adulis,[32] and he is the eyewitness of the announcement of the crucial events reported in his *Christian Topography* (2, 54–56). The king of Aksum, (ƎIlläI–e Aṣbəḥa) launches a decisive attack against the king of Ḥimyar Yūsuf As'ar Yaṯ'ar occupying the capital city ▪afār. The temporary Ethiopian annexation of South Arabia brings on the Ḥimyarite throne first a nobleman called Sumūyafa'Ašwa'(*r*. 531–535), imposed and supported by Aksum, then an Ethiopian official named Abraha (documented until 553) who takes the power by force. The end of his ruling, around 560, preludes first to the Persian occupation of ▪afār, between 570 and 575, then to the reduction of Ḥimyar to a Persian province, around the year 575.

All the scholars who commented the chain of events here summarized acknowledged that from this moment on a definitive change occurred in the political relationships among the Red Sea countries, and Aksum was obliged to find a new position within the international framework transformed by the strong Sasanian presence. In other words, one can affirm that the loss of the favorable positions in South-Arabian territory (with the fall of the Tihāma strongholds like Ma'āfir, in the Ǧizān province, and especially the oasis of Naǧrān) was a momentous accident for the African kingdom. The Ethiopian interests suffered a hard blow after the reduction of the freedom of movement of the Aksumite commercial fleet in

[27] Shahîd (1976).

[28] Bausi (2016: 96–117).

[29] About the apocalyptic mood widespread in the Mediterranean Late Antiquity, once can share the criticism against the «often overdetermined perspective on apocalypticism that views it as fundamentally aligned with resistance to temporal authorities» (Shoemaker 2018: 3). Actually, also in the minds of the 6th–seventh cent. Aksumite kings «apocalypticism was, to the contrary, regularly joined to ideas of imperial expansion and triumph, which expected the culmination of history to arrive though the universal dominion of a divinely chosen world empire» (*ibidem*).

[30] Bezold (1905: 135–137).

[31] Harmatta (1974), Sidebotham (1996: 792–797), Bowersock (2004), Howard-Johnston (2017).

[32] Wolska-Conus (1968: 364–369), Garzya (1992: 64–66), Bowersock (2013: 22–33), Speidel (2015: 83–88).

the whole Red Sea. The decline of the substantial incomes deriving from the control of sea trading, and consequently from the collection of duties, was a factor of crisis for Aksum, whose ruling class resulted impoverished. Because of the Sasanian naval blockade, the Ethiopian kings lost financial resources to fund the monumental public works requested to maintain and guarantee the social control.

Apparently, the victorious expedition of the Sasanian army resulted in occupying the Dahlāk islands and the Eritrean coast, because local traditions attribute to the Furs, commonly identified with the Persians, old luxuriant plantations and the digging into the ground of wells for gathering the night humidity.[33] Until today, there is no evidence supporting the hypothesis that the same army, starting from a bridgehead on the archipelago, crossed the Red Sea and occupied the Eritrean coast. In this case, the Persians could have attacked and ruined the structures of the Adulis port, causing a serious damage to the economy of the Ethiopian kingdom. However, the effects of the chain of political and military events occurred on the Asiatic shore of the Eritrean Sea were sensible for the financial economy of Aksum, based since the first cent. AD on the sea trading between Alexandria and India. For six centuries, the wealth of the Ethiopian kingdom owed so much to the political and economic relationship with Adulis that it would be crucial to understand until when the biggest port of the Red Sea stayed active and remained under the Aksumite control, before its inhabitants definitively abandoned the city. The chronological sequence, reconstructed through field researches, culminates with the period between the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh cent., when a part of the town was covered by fluvial sands, with the collapse of walls and the progressive accumulation of sediments over them.[34] Thus, interpretations of the archaeological data would invite us to consider the decline of Adulis as the effect of an environmental disaster, but one can also presume that some external factors, e.g. the Persian intervention, could have damaged the urban structures and weakened the capability of the citizens to react against the natural phenomena they had previously faced with success.

Whatever happened to Adulis in the same time the Sasanians reduced Ḥimyar to a Persian province, around the year 575, some elements lead us to think that the diminishing of the international role of the Eritrean port was rather slow, and the process lasted for the whole seventh cent., culminating at the beginning of the eighth cent. Indeed, after the Sasanian rule in Yemen was overthrown, and the Umayyad Caliphate definitively annexed the whole region, we have enough information about the increase of the Arabian naval activities in the Red Sea. At the beginning, the aim of the Caliphate was to develop the route connecting Qulzum (Clysma) to Ǧidda, namely Sinai to Hiğaz, therefore the ports of the Eastern Mediterranean shores to Mecca. The growth of the competition between the Arabian interests and the still living presence of the Aksumite fleet, based in Adulis, became unavoidable. In the year 641, the rivalry resulted in an open conflict, when an

[33] Conti Rossini (1928: 295–296), Puglisi (1966: 41–43), Tedeschi (1966: 51–52).

[34] Paribeni (1907: 570), Anfray (1974: 753), Zazzaro et al. (2014: 50–51).

anti-Ethiopian naval expedition started from Ǧidda, with the goal of damaging the Eritrean port used by the pirates to organize raids against the coast controlled by the Caliphate.[35]

With reference to the Arab-Ethiopian relations, it is useful to reconsider the artistic witness provided by the cycle of frescos decorating the internal walls of the palace of Quṣayr ʻAmra, in the Kingdom of Jordania. The building was erected by the order of the Crown Prince Walīd ibn Yazīd (706–744), namely Walīd II (*r*. 743–744), during the rule of his predecessor Hišām ibn ʻAbd al-Mālik (691–743), in the twenty-year period 724–743. On the walls of the widest room of the architectural complex (including also the *hammām*), painted scenes illustrate the delights of the court's life. On the hall's west wall,[36] six kings are portrayed while giving homage to the 'defender of the faith'. They are «symbolic figures who stand for the whole political and cultural heritage of the world the Arabs had now inherited».[37] Though the writings in Greek and Arabic over the figures' heads are partially lost, one can recognize the historical personalities (the names or their titles). Beside the Persian Khusraw (the I Anūshirwān or the II Parwīz) and the Visigothic Roderic, possibly there are a Turkish *khāqān* and the Chinese emperor, definitely the *kaisar* of Byzantium and the *nəguś* of Ethiopia (the first in the middle of the scene, the second at his left). This record of the king of Aksum, particularly his comparison with the major rulers the Umayyad Caliphate considered enemies of Islām in the first half of the eighth cent., requests a plausible explanation. Likely, at that time an Ethiopian fleet kept on circulating in the Red Sea, as suggested by contemporary Arabic chronicles, claiming that Abyssinian pirates would have plundered Ǧidda in 702.[38] Possibly, the portrait of the *nəguś* on the hall west wall of the Quṣayr ʻAmra palace is the consequence of a military clash, of the Ethiopian defeat, of the Arab conquest of the Dahlāk islands, and of the creation of a local sultanate.

Apparently, there is a contradiction between the philological and artistic data and the archaeological evidence about the end of Adulis, unless we admit that the decline and the depopulation of the Eritrean town does not coincide with the abandon of all the Ethiopian ports on the Red Sea. Actually, already in ancient times the residential and monumental center was located at a certain distance from the sea (twenty stadia according to Procopius, two miles for Cosmas), but the port activities were elsewhere, chiefly in Gabaz(a). This place is known also from the map transmitted together with Cosma's work, who puts here a fundamental institution like the 'custom' (τελώνιον), and the archaeological site has been identified with the Galala 'hills', about 6 km south-east of Adulis.[39] Cosma's map is the only source mentioning another costal place to the north of the town with the name of Samidi. Indeed, surface remains of Late Antique structures have been detected in an

[35] Christides (1994: 27–42).

[36] Fowden (2004: 197–226).

[37] Fowden (2004: 199).

[38] Wüstenfeld (1859: 44).

[39] Peacock and Blue (2007: 33–37).

archaeological site located about 7 km north of Adulis, and they can be reasonably identified with this ancient port.[40] To sum up, the rich and Hellenized center was distinguished from the port neighborhoods, according to an urbanistic and topographic solution commonly exploited in ancient times.[41]

A sufficiently clear picture seems to emerge from this reconstruction. The network of ports with Adulis at its center kept on functioning for a period longer than commonly admitted, independently from the destiny of the residential center and even after the inhabitants abandoned the city. From the last quarter of the sixth cent., the Persians, now masters of the west coast of the Arabian Peninsula and of the ports of Mokhā and ʻAden, in the attempt to prevent the access of Aksum to the sea, occupied the Dahlāk islands. Maybe they occasionally landed on the Eritrean shore, in proximity to the Buri peninsula. The new situation of the sea trading brought Adulis to ruin, but the ports—with the contribution of pirate societies—kept on working in favor of the Ethiopian interests, even after the Tihāma and Hiğaz coasts passed into the Arab caliph hands. The collaboration between Aksum and the Eritrean pirates is a well-known fact at least from the fourth cent., because in the events which brought about the evangelization of Ethiopia the pirates played a role. Once attacked the ship having Frumentius of Tyrus on board, they delivered the ʻapostle of Ethiopiaʼ to the Aksumite court, where he educated the young ʻEzana a Christian. The two naval expeditions started from Ğidda, in 641 and after 702, were against the pirates and their bases, but the real purpose was to keep Aksum far from the sea and to consolidate the Arab interests in the whole region. The fresco of Quṣayr ʻAmra, where the defeated *nəguś* gives homage to the winning caliph, could be seen not only as an expression of the claim of the Islamic sovereign to rule the entire world, but also as a consequence of the conclusion of this conflict.

Discussing the reasons, the times and the modalities of the decline of Adulis, we enter the core of a similar debate dealing with the end of Aksum itself. The scientific *querelle* is burning since in the area of the ancient Ethiopian capital city scholars retrieved geo-archaeological data indicating environmental factors as possible causes of the collapse and end of the town as well as of the state. The starter of these researches of ʻecologicalʼ trend has been Karl Butzer (1934–2016), a charismatic figure of archaeologist and geographer, who in the 1970s first applied to the Aksum area a ʻgeodinamicʼ analysis.[42] From the study of the sediments, he deduced the existence of several alluvial strata under the Aksum soil, corresponding to different aggradation phases. He interpreted the first stratum and the related phase as the effects of a period of intense rains fallen over the Central Tigray highlands between the first and the fourth cent., with important agricultural and anthropic

[40] Peacock and Blue (2007: 65–77).

[41] As in the cases of Athens and Piraeus, Rome and Ostia, Ravenna and Classe, just to quote a few; cf. Zazzaro (2017: 161), illustrating the «pattern of port facilities separated from the residential area and located elsewhere on the coast or on islands, both for administrative or practical reasons».

[42] Butzer (1981), Munro-Hay (1991: 259–260).

implications. The high level of soil moisture made possible two harvests per year and became an attractive factor for a growing urban population. The intensive use of the natural resources and of the lands surrounding the town were the logical consequences of these three hundred years of economic and demographic growth. Butzer assigns the second alluvial stratum and the related aggradation phase to a period beginning with seventh cent. The soil proves to be harsher and shows a different composition because of the presence of debris, partially of artificial origin, resulting from the unraveling of architectural structures. Therefore, the scholar can state that «interpretation seems unequivocal: soil and slope instability in response to overintensive land use, particularly of marginal surfaces, combined with wide-spread field and settlement abandonment».[43] Thus, the human action would have been responsible for the progressive impoverishment of lands, for degradation and erosion of soils, in a word for the environmental disaster (according to a model adopted in the case of Adulis too). This situation would have resulted in economic crisis and political disintegration of the state, through a series of passages not firmly documented yet.

Actually, the same interpretation of the geo-archeological data is rather unsecure. Thirty years after Butzer, another group of scholars made a sediments analysis over soils located far from Aksum, in the Southern Tigray region of Lake Ḫašəngä (or Ašangä), drawing conclusions sensibly different.[44] The pluvial phase would have covered the period from third to fifth cent., whereas the harsh phase would have occurred in the middle of sixth cent., namely at the beginning of the 'golden century' of the Aksumite monarchy, when the African state attained the maximum of its political and territorial expansion. Recently, in the same region south of Aksum another archaeological mission brought to light the ruins of a church dating back to the mid-seventh cent. The remarkable dimensions (29 m. × 15 m.) and the refined shape of the building prove that the Christian state was still vital, territorially vast and capable to fund public works.[45]

Even more puzzling is a thesis, recently reaffirmed,[46] imputing the crisis of Aksum to the arrival on the Eritrean shores of the bacteria of the *Yersinia pestis*, in the years when this illness was responsible for the death of thousands of people in the territories of Byzantium. The infection arose after the Gothic war, fought in Italy from 535 to 553. The pandemic known as 'plague of Justinian' severed in Constantinople particularly in the years 541–542 and one can imagine that via Yemen and through the Eritrean ports the disease entered in Ethiopia too, around the year 548. A reliable evidence is provided by the ESA inscription *CIH* 541, dictated by the Ethiopian official Abraha, who overthrown the Ḥimyarite nobleman Sumūyafa'Ašwa'and took the power in ▪afār.[47] The text of the long and celebrated epigraph gives an overview of the complex political situation of South Arabia

[43] Butzer (1981: 487).

[44] Marshal et al. (2009).

[45] Gaudiello and Yule (2017: 238–244).

[46] Yohannes (2011).

[47] Avanzini (2014: 253–258).

in the years preceding the Sasanian occupation. The inscription records how the restoration of the Ma'rib dam, promoted by Abraha himself, slowed down just because of the pestilence and the state of permanent war in the country. Actually, even admitting that Ethiopian soldiers serving in the Abraha's army introduced the disease in Aksum, there is no reason to think that the infection had social and political consequences like those registered in other Mediterranean areas where it developed in the same decades. The absence of evidence from the Ethiopian side, both textual and archaeological, prevent us from attributing to the epidemic factor and to the related theory of the sanitary disaster a decisive role in the beginning of the process that brought about the decline and the end of the African metropolis.

Actually, the accumulation of sediments and debris in the seventh cent. Alluvial stratum of Aksum proves that the inhabitants of that time faced new troubles in managing the effects of the season rains. Admittedly, the impact of the rainy waters over no longer controlled soils provoked their fast and unstoppable disintegration. Yet, in such a case, one can hardly decide whether disastrous natural events activated the political crisis or, vice versa, internal factors weakened the social bonds and provoked the loosening of the mechanisms of civil cohabitation, facilitating the negative effects of atmospheric events. In other words, rather than explaining the economic and political crisis as the effect of the human exploitation of natural resources, it is useful to emphasize the environmental consequences of the social troubles, pointing out the presence of constant and verifiable dynamics in different historical contexts. When a community economically structured and hierarchically organized loses its cohesion because of the impact of whatever crisis factor, internal or external, the capability of maintaining the collective control of the environmental modifications slows down and the natural elements reconquer their original predominance, detrimental for the development of the same community.

Assuming this interpretative pattern, the ending of the Aksumite political history seems to coincide with the sunset of the previous forms of civil cohabitation. Actually, there is no evidence indicating that a military clash with an external enemy determined the decline of the state. Rather, the crisis of Aksum was the consequence of a failure in the social system operating for centuries and fostered by the financial resources coming from Adulis. To a considerable extent, the financing of the public works (particularly those requested for gathering and saving season waters) and the private building activities were depending on the incomes from trading in Adulis. Consequently, it is reasonable to think that only the access to the sea, through the Eritrean port, allowed the African state to take part in a profitable system of commercial traffics and to collect the money for social investments. Without that, a serious repercussion affected the capital city, and the whole kingdom suffered far-reaching consequences because of an economic, social and political crisis, which eventually brought about the end of the Aksumite state.

Significantly, if we look for a starting point of the process that culminated in the end of the political life of Aksum, we should better take into consideration the numismatic evidence as a good indicator of the different economic phases. Even though Aksumite monetary history—of fundamental importance for the reconstruction of the controversial

kings' chronology– keeps on fomenting an intense debate,[48] scholars agree on three points at least.

1. Coinage is present in Aksum without interruption since the end of the third cent. AD, when we register the circulation of the first issue of money by a king named Endybis.
2. The Aksumite authorities determined the weight of the golden coin to the extent of a half of the Roman *aureum*, namely g 2,7 against 5,4,[49] following the Diocletian reform of the year 296.
3. The last Aksumite kings who promoted and imposed coinage for international trade reigned in the first half of the seventh cent.

Therefore, according to the most convincing reconstruction, after Adulis lost its international economic role, the kings of Aksum abandoned the monetary economy as the result of a drastic reduction of the state-regulated international trade. Actually, the coins of the last Aksumite kings are of bad quality and the quantity of gold they contain is lower than in the previous centuries. This too is a clear sign of the crisis of the Ethiopian involvement in the sea trading system that started from the port of Adulis and progressively affected the Aksum metropolis.

If things are so, we can date the beginning of the Aksum decay to the period immediately after the Sasanian intervention in South Arabia, in the last quarter of the sixth cent., when the resources deriving from the trades managed by Adulis started to be insufficient. As it happens regularly in cases like this, the effects of the crisis of the economic system supporting the social organisation had dramatic consequences on the forms of the human settlement.[50] In spite of the scarcity of data, we can reconstruct this 'early post-Aksumite' period, marked by distinctive features.[51] We observe the contraction of the urban population and its partial redistribution outside the city area previously inhabited, with the consequent political fragmentation and the foundation of chiefdoms, guided by new elites of which we still know very little.

In the process, factors of economic crisis and cultural discontinuity intertwined according to the pattern 'transformation without disaster'. Social and institutional actors must have disappeared, who dominated the political scene of Aksum during the whole period when Adulis functioned as a place of transfer and exchange of goods and riches. The two civil elites, that of the state officials and that of the businesspersons, but also the two main institutions, the Crown and the Church, were forced to redefine their own social roles, very much reduced within the new economic and political panorama. Archaeologists and historians can agree in identifying the causes that determined this new phase, namely the inexorable decline of trades and towns, the gradual weakening of the state authority and the

[48] Bausi (2003), Phillipson (2014: 181–193).

[49] Pedroni (1997: 20–22).

[50] Phillipson (2014: 209–212).

[51] Michaels (2005: 201–216).

growing international isolation, until the establishment of new political authorities, as expressions of cultural and social groups on the rise.

This is a key for interpreting the latest known inscriptions carved in Aksum by the will of a political authority. *RIÉ* 193 I-II = *DAE* 12 and 13 are cut on the same stone by a historical figure named Danəʾel, self-styled *ḥaḍani*. The word means in Gəʿəz 'tutor, guardian', and here possibly indicates that this Danəʾel was playing a hegemonic role *de facto*, but without a full legitimacy. He titles himself also 'son of Däbrä Fərem',[52] a qualification which could be the clue of a possible religious affiliation, because in Gəʿəz *däbr* is the word indicating both a mountain and a monastery. Most probably, to this enigmatic ruler, who lived at some point in the post-aksumite phase, between 9th and 11th cent., we can attribute the anonymous inscription *RIÉ* 194 = *DAE* 14 too. In this text, the sovereign includes among his military deeds the victory over another *ḥaḍani*, named Karuray, the fight near Kassala against the Barya people, and the submission of the *nəguś* of Aksum. The last information is precious, because it revels the persistence in the old capital city of a ruling class vindicating a continuity with the imperial past, even though the royal title was purely formal, and the *nəguś* was no more than the head of one of the various chiefdoms struggling for the dominance over Northern Ethiopia. This leadership has the merit to have allowed the survival of a 'capital without empire', thanks to the agreement with the Christian Church. From this pact between the religious and the secular institutions, the new profile of Aksum arose, that of a 'holy city' for the whole Ethiopian Christianity. Here the Tables of the Law are kept since the times of the Queen of the South Makəḍḍa and the King of Israel Solomon, as the mythical narrative of the *Kəbrä Nägäśt* supports. Here through the centuries the Ethiopian emperors went regularly to receive the religious investiture from the hands of the Metropolitan, the head of the Church and somehow the only heir of the Late Antique Aksum.

Within the general debate about the 'imperial' phenomenon, with special reference to the role played by ethnicity as a factor of legitimation and integration,[53] we can look at the historical experience of Aksum as an interesting model. Actually, the formation and the development of this ancient African state is more the work of a multi-cultural ruling class, exemplified by figures like the third cent. Sembrouthes and the fourth cent. 'Ezana, rather than the manifestation of an 'ethnic' group taking the power and imposing *manu militari* its rule on the surrounding peoples. From its beginning, the economic and political growth of Aksum into the space a 'regional empire' is largely due to its close relationship with Adulis and the sea. The rise, the long success and eventually the decline of the Eritrean port determined fortunes and misfortunes of the Aksumite history. The access to the sea allowed the cosmopolite kings of Aksum to exercise a political influence over the territories from

[52] Munro Hay (1991: 262–264), Munro-Hay and Nosnitsin (2005).

[53] Particularly, Gehler and Rollinger (2014: 9) pose the question «ob Imperien ihre Geschichtlichkeit anders als Nationen und Nationalstaaten begründen, um ihre Integration (im Inneren) zu befördern und ihre Legitimation (nach außen wie innen) zu festigen».

Meroe to Ḥimyar, with the constant target of controlling the maritime trade route from Qulzum to ‘Aden. As long as the geo-political context enabled the exchange of goods and riches between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, the ‘empire of Adulis-Aksum’ prospered as a multi-national political building.[54] As soon as external circumstances and factors prohibited the pursuit of trade activities, the same empire was forced to turn inward and to look for new ‘national’ paths for its survival.

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[54] Approximately, one can imagine the number of constituents of the political mosaic kept together by the sovereigns of Aksum and their courts by reading the celebrated Greek inscription (most probably to be dated between 195 and 220 AD) Cosmas found on a throne in Adulis and transcribed in his work. For the most recent analysis of this text by an unknown Ethiopian ruler, see Speidel (2016).

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What Role Did Climate Change Play in the Decline of the Tang Dynasty?

Hans van Ess

The decline of the Chinese Tang dynasty (618–907 AD) has traditionally been ascribed to an interplay of complicated factors such as administrative mismanagement, imperial overstretch, and societal unrest. Recently, however, historians have begun to reconsider a climatic explanation for the rapid changes of power that took place in the Central Asian steppe and precipitated the end of the Tang. In this article I will first summarize how traditional Chinese historians have described the dynasty's gradual loss of power. I then look at the more recent theories as to why the rise and fall of the steppe empires roughly coincided with Tang rule in China. Finally, I come to the conclusion that while the data on climate change is revealing, we probably do not yet know enough about such phenomena during the Chinese middle ages to merit attributing the fall of the Tang to them.

1 A Brief Overview of the Traditional Chinese View of the Decline of the Tang[1]

The Tang period is usually seen as one of the most glorious times in China's history: Chinese poetry reached its apex, and Chinese armies expanded far into Central Asia. The Tang is often praised as a cosmopolitan empire, since its territory included peoples of

[1] The history of the Tang period has been told in several works of Western sinology, but the second volume of Otto Franke's *Geschichte des chinesischen Reiches* (Berlin: de Gruyter 1930,

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various different ethnic backgrounds whose leaders could rise to eminent positions in the official hierarchy. The Tang was also the only Chinese dynasty during which a woman was not only in charge of government while a child emperor was ostensibly in power,[2] but ultimately rose to the throne herself as empress regnant. From 690 until her death in 705 she adopted the new dynastic title Zhou.

These are circumstances that may please a progressive reader of the twenty-first century, but for traditional Chinese readers they implied that the Tang had problems from its very beginning. Rule by a woman was not seen as a welcome event but a disaster, indicating that the dynasty had lost power to a greedy striver after only three of its rulers had held the throne[3]; generals could march their multiethnic armies through territories uncharted by any Chinese ruler. As early as 751, the Korean general Gao Xianzhi (died 756) was defeated in the famous battle at the Talas river, far beyond the traditional boundaries of the Chinese empire, by a team of only Arab and Tibetan forces. The Tang had enjoyed a full century without a strong rival in the steppe before this event, although the mere power to send out an army did not mean that the vast land the Tang forces could march through was actually under the control of the Chinese empire.

In order to administer a territory that was much too large to be overseen by the Tang bureaucracy, the central government had given far-reaching authority to imperial commissioners, the so-called *jiedushi*. The reality of a multiethnic population, as nice as it may look to the twenty-first century reader, posed huge problems to the Tang because the leaders in the provinces did not always exhibit clear dynastic loyalties. One of the *jiedushi*, the semi-Sogdian and semi-Turkic An Lushan (703–757), was given the authority to control three military provinces and started a rebellion in the middle of the eighth century that nearly brought down the Tang: in 755, An Lushan established a new dynasty called the Yan, causing Emperor Xuanzong (reigned 713–755) to flee from his capital to remote Sichuan in the hope that Turkish troops could not reach him there. Only a few years

pp. 350–529) reports the events in a way that is uniquely similar to Chinese written sources like the two Standard Histories of the Tang written during the tenth and eleventh century, respectively. Other works such as the *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3, *Sui and T'ang China* (ed. by Dennis Twitchett) may follow the standards of modern historiography better, but they make it much more difficult to understand the bias of traditional Chinese historians, and when these modern sources are unable to verify their historical predecessors they often leave out details that may be necessary for understanding the Chinese historiographic tradition (Twitchett 1979). It does not seem useful for the purpose of this short article to give a full overview of all the secondary history that has been produced in recent decades on the history of the Tang. Instead will I refer to Franke's description, which contains many vivid elements found in the Tang sources themselves that later Western historians have dropped.

[2] This had been the case quite often in Chinese history before.

[3] In fact, Empress Wu Zetian had already come to the palace as a child in 637 AD, during the reign of the second emperor, Taizong. She became the main wife of his son, Emperor Gaozong, in 655. After Gaozong died in 683, she made emperors out of two of her sons in a row before she took the throne herself in 684.

separated the Tang's successful conquests in Central Asia from the rebel defeat of the Tang emperor.

The Tang dynasty never regained a powerful leader after its first fifty years, and the longest-serving Tang ruler, Xuanzong, only managed to stay in power for 42 years. Many Tang emperors died unnatural deaths, some as minors, apparently at the hand of the eunuchs who were a constant presence at court. This is at least what the Tang annals tell us, compiled only about twenty years after the demise of the Tang empire in 907. Traditionally, the decline of the Tang is ascribed to the eunuchs within the palace and to military commissioners in the provinces, but Confucians also blamed the influence of Buddhists and Daoists, who allegedly turned the attention of the emperors towards religion and away from imperial duties. In 819, the poet-official Han Yu (768–824) wrote his famous memorial against the worship of Buddhism, calling for the destruction of Buddhist temples and the return of its monks to lay status. Han Yu was banished as a result, but three decades later measures were taken against monks of several religions because Tang rulers considered religions to be responsible for the weakness of the empire.[4]

A census taken in 754 registered over 50 million inhabitants of the Tang empire, while only ten years later, after the rebellion and the ensuing war against An Lushan, just 17 million people were counted,[5] which shows that while many people must have died, a great number had simply avoided the census-takers. The Tang bureaucracy had been left so weakened that it was unable to find its people and, more importantly, to levy taxes from them. One may say that the second half of the three hundred years of Tang rule was a time of Chinese decline and of growing influence by those neighboring peoples, mainly Turks and Tibetans, who before had been so proud to be registered as subjects of the Tang empire. They became more and more independent, again creating their own empires in northern and western China. What had been a cosmopolitan empire now started to lose many of those territories inhabited by foreign peoples even though, in a strange historical coincidence during the fifth decade of the ninth century, the Uighur and Tibetan population groups that were the two major competitors of the Tang declined as well. The Uighurs, previously a strong power in the Mongolian steppe, lost their competitive status because of domestic problems. Many of them were resettled in Gansu by the Tibetans, who had been weakened themselves and during the next two decades ceded these territories to the Tang in exchange for titles. This allowed the Tang to claim governance over territories in Gansu that they did not actually control. What is today Xinjiang, however, remained beyond their reach.

The imperial commissioners won. They ruled with a high degree of autonomy in the provinces and felt free to suppress rebellions but also to exploit their territories in order to finance their armies. This in turn seems to have led to further rebellions. One of these rebellions was the famous uprising by Huang Chao (835–884), who in 874 formed a

[4] Franke (1930: 490, 497).

[5] Franke (1930: 468).

movement of rebels who set out from Shandong in eastern China, first going south to the middle of the Yangtze river, then further south along the coast to Fuzhou and Canton, and finally through Guangxi and Hunan back north to Luoyang. In 881, Huang Chao and his army of six hundred thousand finally entered the capital city of Chang'an, which he sacked, killing the members of the imperial family who had stayed behind after the emperor fled to Sichuan with his inner circle, just as Xuanzong had a hundred years earlier. Huang Chao was ultimately driven out of Chang'an and killed in Shanxi in 884 by Li Keyong (852–908), a Turk, whose family had taken on the family name Li, also the name of the ruling house of the Tang, in order to show its loyalty to the dynasty.[6]

After the Tang emperor had left Chang'an, and died in the company of one of his eunuchs in 888, a power struggle developed between Li Keyong and his rival Zhu Wen, a former general of Huang Chao who had betrayed him and as a reward had been given the honorific first name of Quanzhong, the "fully loyal one", by the emperor. When the emperor died, rule passed to his brother in Chang'an, Zhaozong, who at that time was 22 years of age. Fighting broke out in almost all provinces of the empire. Interestingly, the Chinese sources describe Li Keyong, the barbarian, as truly loyal, while treating Zhu Quanzhong, the Chinese, as a traitor. Their version of events is worth summarizing here, not only because it is so vividly told in the Chinese annals but also because it highlights the role of the eunuchs.

In 896, Emperor Zhaozong was forced to leave Chang'an because an officer who claimed to have been treated unfairly turned his troops against the palace. The fleeing emperor turned to Li Keyong for help, and then to the governor of Hezhong. As Chang'an burned in another rebellion, the governor and some eunuchs killed the princes of the Tang ruling house. The governor did not dare to kill Emperor Zhaozong, however, because he feared Zhu Quanzhong and Li Keyong, who both aspired to power. The emperor was able to return to Chang'an, but Li Keyong had to remain in northern China to combat Zhu Quanzhong.

Zhaozong is said to have indulged in alcohol back at the capital and to have once killed several eunuchs and attending women when the two groups went out hunting together.[7] The eunuchs incarcerated him, wanting to install his heir apparent as new emperor, but they in turn were attacked by loyal generals who managed to bring Zhaozong back to the throne, killing twenty eunuchs in the process. The emperor now turned to Zhu Quanzhong, who presided over a massacre of all the other eunuchs, over eight hundred of them. This left the emperor at the mercy of Zhu Quanzhong, who transferred him to the eastern capital of Luoyang, within his own zone of power, and destroyed Zhaozong's former residence in Chang'an, ending the region's long history as a capital of China: it had been one for more than a thousand years, whenever the empire had been strong enough to defend the territory against invading Tibetan or Turkish enemies.

[6] Franke (1930: 507–519).

[7] Franke (1930: 523).

Once the emperor arrived in Luoyang, he made a habit of drinking with the empress and the women of his harem. Zhu Quanzhong decided to have him killed since he did not need him anymore. He sent an officer with a hundred men to broach the newly erected palace. Knocking at the door, the officer pretended that someone was waiting to present an urgent memorial to the emperor. When the door was opened, the officer posted ten men at each inner door and proceeded to the emperor's inner court, where a member of the harem asked him why he had brought soldiers with him to present a memorial. The officer answered her with another question as to the emperor's whereabouts. Half-naked and drunk, Zhaozong tried to hide behind a pillar, but was killed along with one of his concubines.[8]

The portrayal of the eunuchs in this story is particularly interesting. Chinese literati tended to paint a very negative figure of the eunuchs in their histories because they saw them as competitors, who had won access to the emperor not out of competence but simply by virtue of their physical disability. An objective assessment of the eunuchs' position is more complicated. They obviously formed part of the court, and it was their role to protect the emperor from people who otherwise would do him harm. As long as the dynasty performed well, so did the eunuchs. They were well connected, commanded palace guards, and thus formed a substantial cohort within the palace together with the emperor and the empress, both militarily and financially. Without the eunuchs, the emperor was helpless.

The Tang dynasty could have ended with Zhaozong's death, but it did not. Zhu Quanzhong claimed that the women of the harem had killed the emperor, and he established the ninth son of Zhaozong, a boy who at that point was a mere twelve years old, as the new emperor, killing the boy's nine brothers. Zhu Quanzhong's motives for these actions remain unclear, but it is likely that he aimed to establish a new dynasty, which would have required sufficient military strength to withstand the wrath of all those in the empire who claimed to be loyal but in reality simply had not dared to become emperor themselves or had missed their chance to do so.

Li Keyong had settled in Shanxi, quite close to Luoyang, and other generals opposed Zhu Quanzhong as well. He suffered from several defeats at their hands when one of his advisors told him that he now had to depose the emperor in order to silence those who hoped for a restoration of the Tang. It took the usual ritual excuses before Zhu Quanzhong finally forced the child emperor to sign his own abdication, whereupon the boy was installed as king of a minor province and taken to the manor house of one of his officers. There he was killed by Zhu Quanzhong, "the fully loyal one", one year later.

This marked the end of the Tang dynasty and the beginning of the epoch of five short-lived dynasties that were established in northern China from 907 to 959. Zhu Quanzhong's Later Liang dynasty lasted until 922, when Li Keyong's successors established the later Tang dynasty, which after thirteen years was ended by the rulers of the even more short-lived Later Jin dynasty, which in turn was superseded by the Later Han and the Later Zhou before the Song dynasty (960–1280) was able to reunify the essential parts of the empire

[8] Franke (1930: 527).

again. The Song dynasty, however, had to share power with the Khitan-Liao, its strong neighbors who had long been settled on the northeastern borders of the Tang empire, as well as with the half-Tibetan Western Xia and a strong empire in Tibet proper. After about 150 years, the Song had to cede a large portion of northern China to yet another foreign dynasty, the Jurchen Jin, who were the ancestors of the last dynasty to rule over China, the Manchurian Qing. The empire of the Jin was extinguished by the Mongols and the Song in the thirteenth century.

2 Social Unrest and Migration

What was the real reason, then, for the demise of an empire that had lasted for almost three hundred years? The traditional idea has been that a simple loss of power could have been responsible for the collapse of the Tang, but its emperors had, of course, been weak for a good two thirds of the dynasty's long duration. Northern China had long been dominated by non-Chinese as well. The historical Chinese sources ascribe the reason for the decline of the Tang dynasty to the steady rise of the military commanders or the imperial commissioners, whom the dynasty ceased to have control over after the rebellion of An Lushan in the mid-eighth-century.

At first sight, this explanation seems to be very much in line with the ideas of modern political scientists who assert that empires lose their power at some point through overreach. It is striking, however, to see how long the Tang did indeed remain in power without a truly powerful court, and how long it took until such overreach actually worked against the dynasty. After all, the battle at the Talas river took place only about halfway into the reign of the Tang, and military governors administered large parts of the empire for more than 150 years.

Primary as well as secondary sources report much about social unrest during the second half of the Tang empire. They attribute the growth of this unrest during the ninth century to fiscal measures the Tang had to take in order to create the additional revenue the state needed to finance a bureaucracy whose duty it was to ensure social order. This measure backfired, however, because the burden imposed on the peasants was too heavy. The bureaucracy was left unable to do what it was expected to do for the population, and ultimately provoked rebellion by the very measures that were meant to prevent it. Measures against Buddhist monasteries were taken for the same reason: monasteries had become incredibly rich, and they were made to pay their share. The government obviously needed money in order to buy the loyalty of the military commanders it had established to secure the borders—borders that had considerably shrunk when compared to the size of the world empire the Tang had controlled in the seventh century. Peasants left their homes and estates because of high taxation. In a vicious cycle, they were to become the sources of the rebellions that were widespread throughout the empire.

And yet, we must question whether it is wise to ascribe the decline of the Tang state to a simple financial mechanism that, in one way or another, worked whenever an empire

collapsed. Indeed, bandit gangs formed in all parts of the empire as a result of what was seen as greediness on behalf of the state. The process of decline accelerated in the beginning of the ninth century, as is evident in the short reigns of the many emperors during this time: Shunzong reigned from 805 to 806, Xianzong from 806 to 821, Muzong from 821 to 825, and Jingzong from 825 to 827. Although Wenzong ruled from 827 to 840, Wuzong was allotted a span of only six years, from 841 to 847. None of these emperors was able to exert power in a significant way. But interestingly the Tibetans and the Uighurs, the Tang's neighbors and longtime competitors, underwent their own period of change and decay that culminated in the loss of their empires in the 840 s, at exactly the same moment when the power of the Tang emperors was visibly in decline. If we look further to the west, the Abbasides suffered a similar fate, again at about the same time: the Abbaside empire split up into autonomous dynasties beginning in the year 861. It should be obvious to any historian who notices how simultaneously these processes seem to have happened that they were not caused by fiscal problems alone but that something else must have happened that affected several empires at the same time.

Migration may have played an important role as well: although northern China had been regularly inhabited by people who came from the steppe or places adjacent to it since at least the fourth century, such groups were usually fragmented and did not have sufficient numbers to conquer all of China. The Tang, however, became powerful by unifying these groups under one rule. Foreigners such as Sogdians or Turks now became a factor in domestic politics that could be used against the unruly Chinese opposition. Former northerners had clearly understood themselves as "Chinese"—whatever that word may mean—and adopted the Chinese style of leadership and administration because they considered it superior to their own. At the end of the Tang, however, some peoples seem to have been less prone to submit to the Chinese lifestyle: the Khitan-Liao, as well as the Mongols later on, were resolute in their steppe traditions. Ethnic differences and antagonisms are a difficult subject to assess in such ancient history; again, the more contemporaneous Chinese sources on the end of the Tang describe northern Turks as more loyal to the Tang than their Chinese counterparts. During power struggles at the time, however, these Turks may have found collaborators among their compatriots who had resettled in Tang territory after the collapse of the Uighur empire[9]—and this in turn may have paved the way for the rule of northern dynasties on precisely that soil.

Northern China, which had once been the heartland of Chinese culture, ceased to exert major influence on a cultural level during the Tang-Song transition era. Examination registers of the Song show that although the Song managed to control the north for one and a half centuries (960–1127), few successful examination candidates came from northern China after the tenth century.[10] Instead of the central northern plain, the most important creations of Chinese culture now came from the region south of the Yangtze

[9] Franke (1930: 491–493), Drompp (2005).

[10] Hartwell (1982), Chaffee (1995).

river. It very much looks like northern China contained a different population during this time, with different customs from those that had been there before the transition took place. One reason why Chinese culture survived the great population changes that happened in this period was that the large amount of land available in the south provided enough space for cultural renewal.

3 Modern Attempts to Identify Climate Change as the Reason for the Rise and Fall of Steppe Empires and the Case of the Tang

Such dramatic historical changes call for a wider variety of explanations. One such explanation that has gained momentum during the past few years is climate change. This answer has been given, for example, to solve the riddle of the rise and fall of the steppe empires in Asia that began in the sixth century and continued well into the thirteenth or fourteenth century.[11] Large volcanic eruptions in 536, 540, and 547 CE are purported to be the reason for the Late Antique Little Ice Age (LALIA) that led to the dominance of the Turks in Mongolia.[12] Nicola Di Cosmo, together with Clive Oppenheimer and Ulf Büntgen, has attributed the downfall of the Eastern Turk Empire in 630 AD to climate change, possibly a large volcanic eruption.[13] The absence of such volcanic eruptions has been given by some researchers as an explanation for what is called "Medieval Climate Anomaly" (MCA), where "anomaly" alludes to the fact that no anthropogenic causes can explain the phenomenon, unlike the climate change in our time. From what we know about climate, however, what happened in 900 AD did not constitute an anomaly at all. Therefore, many prefer to call this time the "Medieval Warm Period" (MWP), said to have lasted from roughly 900 AD to sometime between 1200 and 1300.

Such theories related to the history of the climate are interesting for the Tang empire as well. This Chinese dynasty was well established in the steppes for a long time, and it did remain in close contact with its neighbors there even when it could not control their territories anymore. The downfall of the Turk empire and the beginning of the MWP roughly coincide with the rise and fall of the Tang. Di Cosmo has speculated based on reconstructed tree-ring chronology that a drought lasting for more than sixty years (until 840 AD) may have brought about the fall of the Uighur empire that had been closely related to the Tang. He does, however, justly and cautiously point to the fact that the Uighurs had apparently been able to adapt surprisingly well to the drought for a long time before their empire finally collapsed.[14] One might speculate that the same drought also affected the

[11] Infact a climatic explanation has been given by Russian historians many decades ago. See Gumilev (1987: 18–26).

[12] Büntgen et al. (2016).

[13] Di Cosmo et al. (2017).

[14] Di Cosmo et al. (2018).

Tang, but that, as a bureaucratically organized empire, the dynasty was even better prepared to cope with it. This of course raises the question as to whether climate change is even a factor in the downfall of empires.

Büntgen et al. have also used tree-ring widths in an attempt to reconstruct the temperatures of this era and developed a diagram showing that the LALIA started at the time when temperatures in the northern hemisphere fell to an historic low.[15] The relative reliability of tree-ring-based temperature reconstructions appears to still be a matter of heated debate among specialists dealing with this issue; many have warned of taking such methods too far.[16] Unfortunately, although there seems to be general agreement about the approximate span of climate trends, the various temperature reconstructions will often arrive at disparate results as far as the exact datings and degrees of temperature are concerned. Luterbacher et al. have produced reconstructions for Europe that are similar to Büntgen and allow for greater variability.[17] Looking at Luterbacher's figures demonstrates the somewhat surprising conclusion that temperatures during the European Middle Ages may have been as high there as they are today, without any human interference, and that the rises and declines in temperature may have happened just as fast. This is in line with findings by Patzelt[18] showing that temperatures in some parts of the Alps may have been higher in the Middle Ages than they are today. It is probably wise to calculate with a considerable degree of possible variation between the figures. For our purposes, it should be sufficient to follow the conclusion by Luterbacher et al. that the temperatures may have been slightly warmer in the tenth century than they were in the twentieth century,[19] and that in both cases they were probably lower before (Fig. 1).

It may be of interest that Di Cosmo, Büntgen et al., have written another article in which they endeavor to show that the Mongol withdrawal from Hungary in 1242 CE was due to climate change. According to Büntgen and Di Cosmo, documentary sources and tree rings demonstrate that there were unusually warm and dry summers from 1238–1241 AD, followed by cold and wet conditions starting in 1242.[20] This theory has met with fierce criticism from another group of authors,[21] who argue that all the arguments that Büntgen and Di Cosmo advance could also be used to argue for the exact opposite event, and that the historical sources do not support their hypotheses.[22]

[15] Büntgen (2016); See Fig. 1 below, which is taken from Büntgen (2016) and quoted in Di Cosmo et al. (2017).

[16] Hellmann et al. (2016), compare also http://www.climatedata.info/proxies/tree-rings/

[17] Luterbacher et al. (2016).

[18] Patzelt (2014).

[19] As they apparently also had been in the first century.

[20] Büntgen and Di Cosmo (2016).

[21] Pinke et al. (2017).

[22] Büntgen and Di Cosmo (2017) have responded to this criticism. We do not have space here to enter into a discussion of the pros and cons of this debate. Suffice it to say that arguments can be made for

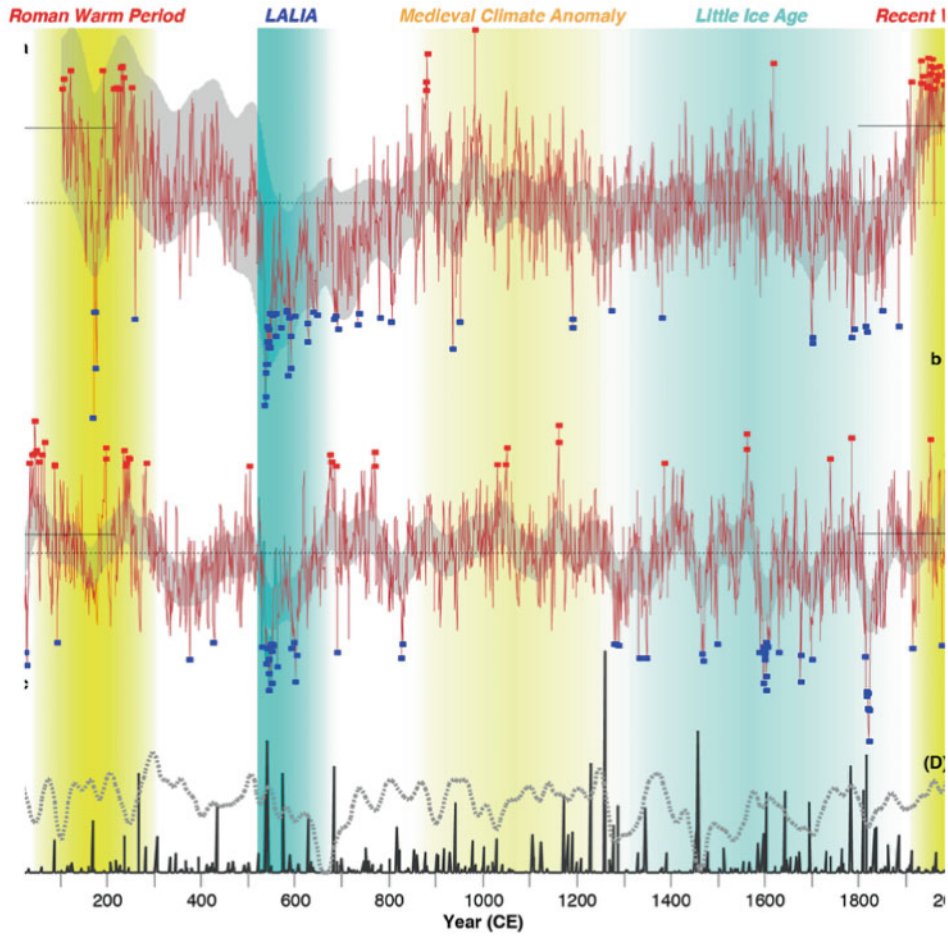

Fig. 1 Eurasian summer temperature variability. (**a**, **b**), Reconstructed temperatures from the Russian Altai (**a**) and the European Alps5 (**b**), with blue and red squares indicating (51/47) positive(51/47) and negative (53/57) annual extremes (>2 standard deviations), respectively. Grey background shadings denote reconstruction uncertainty after eighty-year low-pass filtering (Supplementary Fig. 9). Ice-core-derived global estimates of volcanic14 (GVF; dark grey; (**c**) and total solar irradiance17 (TSI; light dashed grey; (**d**) forcing. Black dashed lines refer to the long-term reconstruction mean of the Common Era. Copyright: Büntgen et al. 2016 where this is Fig. 2. The explanations are by Büntgen)

both sides, namely the experts who think that climate has been an important factor in historical change and the rise and fall of empires, and the experts who think it has not.

Unfortunately, despite some progress and many efforts, including by colleagues in China who have attempted to find evidence of climate changes in historical sources, we still do not know enough about the historical development of the global climate. Important as it would be to know more in our contemporary climate discussions, it is my impression that there are as yet too many lacunae in our records to draw any far-reaching conclusions on historical climate change.[23] Di Cosmo and Büntgen do not refer to the information provided by the Chinese experts, who have come to the conclusion that warm periods in China occurred between AD 1–200, AD 551–760, AD 951–1320, and after AD 1921,[24] findings that are diametrically opposed to the LALIA theory that assumes that there started a little ice age in the middle of the sixth century. Ge et al. conclude from the data they have analyzed that the temperature rise in China during the twentieth century was not all that spectacular when compared to earlier historical periods.

According to their figures, in fact, the Tang period began during a time of rising temperatures, a phase that ended right after the An Lushan rebellion had begun. Data from Ge (see Fig. 2) show that extreme droughts were most frequent during the warm period of 751–800, but also during the cold winters that were common between 1601 and 1650. These droughts may help to explain the beginning of the decline of the Tang (and perhaps also the downfall of the Ming, which was supplanted by the Manchurian Qing in 1644). Unfortunately, they cannot explain why the Tang did not recover afterwards. If we believe Ge's figures, however, then the end of the Tang in approximately 900 CE coincided with a time when temperatures fell to a level that would not be repeated until the mid-seventeenth century (the Ming/Qing transition period) and the mid-nineteenth century. Such falling temperatures may well have caused more trouble to the sedentary population of northern China than to the steppe peoples, but the subsequent rise of steppe empires in northern China coincided with a steep rise in temperatures to a level that was at least as high as our supposedly anthropogenically influenced temperatures today. Extremely high temperatures also affected the Song dynasty (960–1280), while extreme cold was prevalent during Mongol times (the Yuan dynasty lasted from 1280 to 1368).

Interesting as all the figures quoted above may be, especially with regard to 21 century climate debates, it remains very difficult to determine whether climate change played a role in the making and unmaking of dynasties. In China, there seems to be consensus today that the two halves of the Tang period were characterized by two different climate trends: as temperatures rose, until the middle of the eighth century, culture in China flourished, whereas the falling temperatures afterward accompanied a period of decline. Moreover, a convincing argument can be made that the colder climate forced the nomads to move south, although it is much easier to make such an argument on the basis of Ge's calculations than on the basis of his Western counterparts.[25] The rebellion of An Lushan can be seen as an

[23] Ge (2011).

[24] Ge et al. (2011, 2016); See also Xia Fangsheng (2018).

[25] Lan Yong (2001). Interestingly, this explanation would also hold for later dynasties such as those of the Mongols and the Manchu.

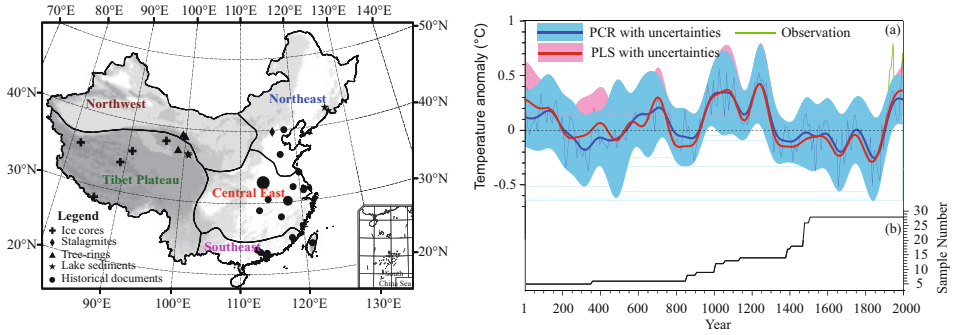

Fig. 2 Historical Temperatures of China (Copyright Ge et al. 2016)

early predecessor of this pressure from the north that ultimately toppled the Tang. Chinese authors have also found evidence that the changes in the climate were perceived as unusual in works of Chinese poetry that were written almost immediately after the climate turned cold, around 760 AD.[26] Shortly before his death, Du Fu (712–770) wrote fifteen poems in which he described the unusual phenomenon of Lake Dongting in southern China freezing over in 768 and 769. One example from these semi-metaphorical poems should be enough to give an idea of the feelings the unusual climate evoked in one of the most famous poets in Chinese history:

North Wind

North wind is destroying southern ends,
Red phoenix[27] daily loses might.
When Dongting in autumn wants snow,
Where shall the wild geese go?
For ten years plenty of killing air,
In all six directions the smoke of men's huts became rare.
I admire the old men at the beginning of the Han,
They were then still freshly eating mushrooms for long life.[28]

The poem is a parable of Du Fu's own life: he sought refuge in southern China but could not find rest, unlike four old men who lived at the beginning of the Han (ca. 200 BC) and were famous throughout Chinese history for having preferred retirement over office. At the same time, the poem describes the prevailing atmosphere in a place that was (and today remains) unaccustomed to snow. For ten years, Du Fu writes, temperatures had been falling and killing life.

[26] Ma Yaling et al. (2015).

[27] The red phoenix is a symbol of the south and its warm climate.

[28] Du Fu (1979, 2025). English translation by the author.

4 Conclusions

The reconstructions of climate data from China present evidence for the simple idea that a warm climate and rising temperatures during most of Chinese history accompanied periods of political stability and cultural progress, while falling temperatures often led to war and decline. As the Tang ascended, temperatures rose to historically high levels, but as the dynasty declined, temperatures fell far below the average baseline which must have been a great challenge for administrators to cope with. Beyond this general observation, however, it is hard to understand the influence of climate on human culture. There are many ways to interpret the figures, and we should also not forget that experts such as Ge (2011) caution us that their data sets are not yet fine-tuned enough to allow for fully reliable reconstructions. Geographical variation seems to have been considerable, moreover, even when limited only to the territory of what is now modern China. In conclusion, therefore, it is worth considering that human beings may be able to adapt to changes in the climate, just as it is possible that human civilizations crumble in the face of climate change. It is plausible that climate indeed played a role in the fall of the Tang, but it was probably only one among other factors.

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An Opinion on the Decentralization of the Mughal Empire

Stephan Popp

1 The Importance of Geography and Logistics for Indian Empires

The Indian subcontinent is a highly self-contained area. The sea encircles its southern half; the Himalayas close it off to the north, the Arakan Mountains to the northeast, and the Hindukush and the Sulaiman Mountains to the west. It is therefore not astonishing that all invaders of the subcontinent by land, with two exceptions,[1] have come from the northwest and used the Hindukush passes near Kabul. The subcontinent itself is clearly divided into a northern and a southern half, with the river Narmada and the surrounding hills as its traditional border. The very flat and extremely fertile plains of North India can support a huge population and large armies. In the hilly terrain of Peninsular India, however, the fertile areas along the rivers alternate with steppe vegetation and small-scale irrigation by tanks. Its population is therefore less dense,[2] and armies tend to be smaller. The monsoon also divides the subcontinent into a dry northeast and a wet southwest, plus the equally wet rain-soaked Western Ghats and the river valleys. As a cliché, people from dry zones

[1] The two exceptions were: (1) the conquest of Assam between 1228 and 1268 by Prince Sukhaphaa from the small 'Northern Tai' state of Mong Mao (today on the border between Burma and China, Chinese side), which established the Kingdom of Assam, and (2) the three Burmese invasions of Assam in 1816, 1819, and 1821, which ended the Kingdom of Assam. They finally led to the first Anglo-Burmese war and the annexation of Assam by the British in 1825.

[2] With the exception of Kerala. The kings of this area, however, were closed off from the rest of the country by the Western Ghats and did not have any dealings with the Mughals, so they are not dealt with in this article.

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typically keep goats, grow wheat or millet, fight on horseback, and are free to engage in warfare after the harvest. People from wet zones typically keep water buffaloes, fight on elephants, grow rice and are professional farmers or soldiers all year. The Mughals usually recruited soldiers from dry zones, which they could send home after war.[3] Feeding its horses and elephants was always a crucial task for the massive Mughal army. Elephants need 200 kilograms of fodder a day. Horse pastures are extremely scarce in the subcontinent; hay is unavailable because farmers must sow their crops at the precise time that hay can be made. Thus horses were fed barley and pulses, which ruined their health in the long run, as did a longer stay in wet areas. Any Indian empire thus depended on the steady import of healthy warhorses from Western Asia; the more so as the main part of an army in the subcontinent were large battalions of mounted archers. A big army was therefore a massive logistical enterprise in the subcontinent: the army could not live off the land but needed to be supplied with enormous quantities of food and fodder by caravans of camel and ox.[4]

These preliminary remarks about the nature of the subcontinent and of logistics of war there may explain why conquering South India from the north easily resulted in the overextension of an empire. Northern armies often relied on massive force, but the rugged terrain of the Deccan brought it to nought and supported the local enemy's guerrilla tactics, and supply had to be organized from a distance. Aurangzeb was not the first northern ruler to overextend his empire this way; Muhammad ibn Tughluq (1325–1351) had done the same before. It was the British who ended this pattern by being less centralized and using standing armies and line infantry that made cavalry futile.

2 Can we Talk of Decline?

That it is difficult to quote a date when the Mughal Empire declined is clear from the fact that several dates can be drawn upon: the beginning of Aurangzeb's 25-year Deccan War in 1682, the death of Aurangzeb as the last 'great' Mughal in 1707, the ascendancy of the Sayyid brothers in 1713, under whom the emperor became a puppet ruler, their deposal in 1722, the sack of Delhi by Nader Shah of Iran in 1739, the Battle of Plassey, which gave the British control over Bengal in 1747, the Battle of Buxar in 1764, after which the Mughal emperor granted Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the British *de jure*, the capture of Delhi by the British in 1803, and the deposition of the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar in 1858. We see that the Mughal Empire was in the process of 'decline' for 150 years, while the period of its growth extends no more than 180 years. We can also quarrel about its founding date because its first founder Babur died in 1530, only four years after his conquest of

[3] Gommans (2002: 10–14).

[4] Ibid.: 112–126.

Delhi, his son then lost and regained the empire, and only his grandson Akbar was finally able to consolidate it.

Moreover, the decline of the empire in the eighteenth century was accompanied by "fantastic" economic growth.[5] While Mughal officers battled each other and up-and-coming new forces, while the emperor was reduced to signing grants for them, while highwaymen roamed the countryside and bribed the authorities (and in one case even the emperor), while official forces had to resolve to highway robbery for want of payment,[6] more and more land was put to agriculture, and the export of cotton textiles reached unprecedented levels. Whether we can talk of 'decline' or not depends on the perspective: most chronicles were written from the viewpoint of the court or the capital Delhi, and both underwent considerable decline in the eighteenth century. Several provinces, however, prospered like never before. Among them were Bengal, Avadh, the Punjab, and later the Deccan.[7] Government manufactories (*kārkhāna*) were numerous all over the subcontinent.

So what happened to the Mughal Empire was a transformation rather than a decline, a transformation toward regionalization. This was the result of the very fabric of the empire. The closer to the local level the empire managed to reach, the more local issues could be represented at the centre, or at least with the provincial governor. Provincial and county (*pargāna*) officials, though appointed by the state and transferred regularly, sought to build a power base in their realms and moreover to have good relations with the local landed gentry (*zamīndār*). In doing so, local affairs and taxes became more important to them than central affairs and taxes, especially when their income from the centre was considerably reduced under Shah Jahan and in arrears in the later years of Aurangzeb.[8] Aurangzeb himself can be held responsible at least for accelerating the process by diverting all incoming money for his war and his court and neglecting to ascertain himself of his position. This was especially true for North India, to which the emperor never returned, but also for the south, where the officers prolonged the war to their own benefit while the enemies built their own realms.[9] To speak of a 'decline' of the Mughal Empire is therefore analogous to speaking of a 'decline' of the Roman Empire in the sense of Gibbon, and in both cases the current consensus is that 'decline' is not the accurate word.[10]

But let us begin with the fabric of the Mughal Empire before we track the stages of its transformation.

[5] Alam: 12.

[6] Pearson (1976: 241–255).

[7] Alam (2001: 11 f).

[8] Ibid.: 299.

[9] Athar Ali (2011: 92).

[10] Bhargava: xlvii.

3 The Structure of the Mughal Empire

As Muzaffar Alam observed, the Mughals could unify the diverse provinces and societies of North India precisely because they were outsiders and uninvolved in internal quarrels.[11] They guaranteed the rights of the *zamīndārs*, the landed gentry, who could be anything from a small lord to a king. They were mostly hereditary, collected taxes from the peasants and were taxed in turn by the empire[12] already long before Mughal rule. In order to be successful, any empire in India had to provide protection for the *zamīndārs* while keeping them unable to rise against it.[13] Most Indian empires tried to collect as much tax from the *zamīndārs* as possible in order to keep the system running on the one hand and the majority of the *zamīndārs* content on the other. The Mughals were the first empire in India that was able to prescribe taxes for the *zamīndārs* by calculating average ten-year yields of every district. Earlier empires had no knowledge about the yield of their land, so the *zamīndārs* had considerable control over negotiating their taxation.[14] Sumit Guha showed in 2015 that Mughal figures for yield were often rough estimations, frequently obsolete, and not conducted in every district, and that *zamīndārs* continued to negotiate their taxes.[15] However, the Mughal state still had some means to assess how much tax could be expected.

The Mughals demanded the tax in cash and used it to finance the army and state. There was no distinction between army and civil officers, though individual responsibilities varied. They developed their system of officers from the rank system of Timur's army, called *manṣab*. Originally, it was divided into leaders of ten-thousand, thousand, hundred, and ten cavalry, but the numbers were only nominal. In 1565 Emperor Akbar introduced a double ranking with a personal (Persian *ẕāt*) rank and salary and a fixed number of cavalry (Persian *savār*) to be kept, for which the *manṣabdār* received payments per horse. Payments per horse were much more than the personal salary. Throughout the Mughal era, this was a temptation to employ fewer permanent troops and to keep the money.[16]

A second reform by Akbar in the 1580s led to the Mughal version of land tenure. From then on, the officers were paid in cash from the income of a specified province or district. This income was called *jāgīr*. The officers neither owned nor ruled their land, though they had to keep order for the emperor. They were transferred regularly, on average once every three years so that they remained loyal to the state and could not establish roots in a province.[17] They had to extract their own salary from their *jāgīr*, usually one-third of an

[11] Alam (2001: 305).

[12] Athar Ali (2011: 84).

[13] Kulke and Rothermund (1982: 161 f).

[14] Richards (1993b: 81 f).

[15] Guha (2015: 532, 575).

[16] Moreland (1998: 213–233); In 1646, the wages paid for cavalry ranks amounted to 77.2% of all salaries and to 47.7% of the whole tax yield. Cf. Qaisar, A. Jan 2006; Distribution of the Revenue Resources of the Mughal Empire among the Nobility. In: Athar Ali (2006: 252–257, 256).

[17] Athar Ali (2011: 75–79).

average harvest; they had to keep up their own provincial courts and their troops; and in addition to that, they had to compete with each other for expensive gifts to the emperor, due on the New Year, the emperor's birthday, and whenever they were summoned to court. Control over the peasants was left with the *zamīndārs*, who stayed in place and fixed their own share of the harvest, and the imperial tax collectors (*ʿāmil*), accountants (*qānūngō*) and reporters to the court (*vaqiʿa-navīs*), who stayed in place as well and worked independently of the *mansabdārs*.

As said, there were several drawbacks to the system. First, control over the *mansabdārs* was not easy. Very often, they tried to save money by employing far fewer cavalry than required and by hiding income. Second, controlling the *zamīndārs* was also difficult. The Mughal state tried to extract as much means from them as possible so that they were unable to unite against it—after all, the empire had imposed itself upon them. There still was always a *zamīndār* in revolt, which meant that nobles or imperial princes rising against the state readily found soldiers for their cause. Threatened with ruin, the *zamīndārs* were eager not to forward any additional income to the *mansabdār* and the court.

However, the Mughal state's claim to power did not derive from money, but from its prestige, or 'the glory of heavenly grandeur' (*farr-i falak-jāhī*), as a court poet put it on the birth of Shah Jahan's second son.[18] The glory of the empire emanated from God to the emperor in order to put the world in order, and from the emperor to the officers, his 'servants' (*banda*), who shared the emperor's responsibility. This claim was first asserted by Akbar, who in 1579 had all the empire's theologians sign a declaration that he himself was the ultimate authority on interpreting religion. Three years later, he founded a very elitist order known as the *Dīn-i ilāhī (Divine Religion)* with himself as the master and the highest officers as his disciples. From then on, the emperor's claim to power no longer rested on the opinion of religious leaders, but on his own claim to be chosen by God as the 'renovator' (*mujaddid*) of Islam in its 1000th year, and thus as the ruler of the world. At least until the earlier reign of Aurangzeb, this claim was said to rest on reason and science as well as on revelation. It included equal treatment in the administration for all religious and ethnic groups (*ṣulḥ-i kull = universal peace*). Akbar's argument was that he was destined to be the ruler of the world precisely because everyone could share in his power, while in Iran only Shi'is could, in Ottoman Turkey only Sunnis could, and in the Portuguese domains only Christians could. In this way, the Mughal emperor was seen as the embodiment of divine glory, divine order, and divine peace, and serving him was considered true religion put into practice and the meaning of life. Conversely, Mughal chronicles usually call rebels both 'pagan' and 'stupid', whether referring to Hindus or Muslims.[19] The prestige of the emperor and his officers was put on display every New Year

[18] Qazvīnī (n.d.), fol. 67 b. All translations from this manuscript are by the author of this article.

[19] For example, Qazvīnī (n.d.) describes the unsuccessful actions of a Muslim and a Hindu officer against the Rānā of Mēwar thus: 'For another time, that difficult affair caused the market of "Abdullāh Ḳhān to flourish, and the actions of Rājā Bāsū to be sought after … Lost in the desert of pagan

and on every birthday of the emperor, when the officers had to bring or send expensive gifts as tokens of their 'sincere devotion' (*ikhlāṣ*). The emperor then gave them more expensive, 'imperial' gifts (and promotions if due), in order to equip his servants for spreading his glory.

4 Development of the Empire under Jahangir and Shah Jahan

As mentioned, the officers were in a dilemma to administer parts of the empire they were barely familiar with prior to their transfer there, and yet they were in need of considerable sums from these lands for representing the court there, for the upkeep of their soldiers, and for the gifts needed to prove their loyalty to the emperor. A successful officer would therefore try to be on good terms with the *zamīndārs* and the tax officers and reporters to the court in his *jāgīr*. This, in turn, meant that the local gentry had access to the court through the officer. Thus they too had an interest in keeping him in place if all worked out well. In this way, the *jāgīr* system had a natural tendency to favour alliances between locals and officers against the centre and to represent local affairs at the court. It is proven that *jāgīrdārs* in Punjab and Bengal were already working toward staying in place in the seventeenth century and that if they were transferred, they maintained close connections.[20]

Moreover, the payment for the officers could not keep pace with the growth of the empire. Jahangir did not control the finances well, which led to the officers keeping significant sums by not employing the required number of cavalry.[21] Shah Jahan (1628–58) therefore had to reduce the payment of the officers by one-third in 1630. In 1642, he reformed the *jāgīr* system further. *Jāgīrs* were now classified in 'monthly tables' according to how long their tax yield could support an officer. He made the officers part-time employees, who were only entitled to a payment of as many months as the income from their *jāgīr* yielded. More than eight months' pay was extremely rare. *Savār* ranks were also reduced this way.[22]

This made the officers considerably poorer than before[23] and stimulated a search for other means of income. This was found in supporting trade and increasing agriculture, which in turn meant that their interest in staying in place increased, and that the *zamīndārs* also earned more. Lower and middle ranks of the state apparatus already were recruited from among the local *zamīndārs*. Officers also tried to have their sons appointed as deputies

ignorance and stupidity (*jahālat-u nādānī*), they had to endure various toils and troubles"'. Qazvīnī, fol. 50 b.

[20] Bhargava (2014: xliv-xlii).

[21] Anwar (2001: 22).

[22] Moreland (1998: 225–232); Athar Ali (2011: 46–49).

[23] Anwar (2001: 21).

in their *jāgīr* in the hope that they were appointed after them.[24] This was possible because Shah Jahan discarded the master-and-disciple approach to the state in favour of the state seen as the emperor's extended household, and favoured the 'house-born' (*khāna-zād*) sons of officers above newcomers.[25] In spite of the cost cuts, Shah Jahan's later unsuccessful wars to gain today's northern Afghanistan, and to recover the city of Kandahar from Iran, strained his finances further.[26]

5 The Crisis in the Later Years of Aurangzeb

The war for the throne between three sons of Shah Jahan did not strain the empire financially, but Aurangzeb had deposed his father and desperately needed a reason to justify it lest opponents would reinstall his father (who died in 1666). His attempt to prove himself as a conqueror did not succeed: the conquest of Assam in 1662 was short-lived and followed by a slow but successful reconquest by the kings of Assam. Conquering rich lands to increase the state income like Akbar did was becoming difficult. Therefore Aurangzeb sought to justify himself by giving the empire a more Islamic outlook. He had Islamic law codified and reintroduced the *jizya*, the tax for non-Muslims. The *jizya* did not apply to the many Hindu officers in the army, but was a matter of concern for many *zamīndārs*.

Meanwhile, local revolts spread over all rural North India. This included the heartland of the empire, just outside Agra and Delhi, where the Jats (1669) and the Satnami sect (1672) rose up and had to be suppressed. The Jats even raided Akbar's tomb. When the king of the vassal kingdom of Marwar died without an heir, Aurangzeb tried to annex his lands against common practice, probably to gain income for new *jāgīrs*. Accordingly, the rulers and armies of Marwar and neighbouring Mewar rebelled (1679), and could not be overcome.[27] Guru Gobind Singh, leader of the Sikhs in the Punjab, reacted to suppression and the execution of his father (1670) by creating the military brotherhood of the Khalsa (1699) and rejecting Mughal rule altogether. All the revolts show that the gentry of North India had become rich enough to take up arms and defy Mughal rule.

Further south, the *zamīndār* Shivajī Bhonsle was carving out a kingdom for himself from his home territory in the northern hills of the Bijāpūr Sultanate. Unlike the Mughal Empire, the Bījāpūr Sultanate was familiar with *de jure* hereditary land titles for long-established, usually Hindu nobles.[28] In contrast to the Mughal nobility, who saw themselves as the emperor's 'devoted slaves' (*banda-yi mukhliṣ*) and deemed it their honour to

[24] Bhargava (2014: xliv-xlii).
[25] Richards (1993a: 263).
[26] Anwar (2001: 45).
[27] Athar Ali (2011: 97–101).
[28] Fukuzawa (1991: 1–48).

serve 'God's shadow, the refuge of the world' (*Ẓillu 'llāh-i jahān-panāh*),[29] these Maratha soldiers were opportunists, supporting the sultan to the extent that the sultan supported their power base. Shivajī's father had fought for the Mughals and Bījāpūr alternately before becoming kingmaker in Bijāpūr, and his grandfather had been a *condottiere* for both Bījāpūr and the Mughals. After 1657, Shivaji began to raid Mughal territories too. In 1664, he sacked Surat, the main Mughal port, unhindered. Then a Mughal army routed him and brought him to the capital. Aurangzeb offered him a *mansab* of 5000, but he refused and demanded 7000, protesting that his young son had 5000. The courtiers had never seen such impudence: this boor had dared to question 'the decree that triggers fate' (*farmān-i qażā-jarayān*)[30] and was asking for more! Shivajī was thrown in jail, but he escaped and worked to recover his kingdom,[31] looting Surat a second time in 1671. In 1674, he had himself crowned king in an ancient Hindu ritual.[32] His son was employed in the Mughal army with a *mansab* of 5000, but the humiliation he had done to Mughal prestige by sacking Surat and refusing a high *mansab* prevailed. Even the Shah of Iran taunted Aurangzeb for not being able to subdue Shivajī.[33]

In 1684, Aurangzeb resolved to conquer the remaining two sultanates in the Deccan, Bijāpūr and Golconda, and to solve the Maratha problem finally. (Shivaji had died in 1680, and his son Shambhaji had inherited his dominion.) He moved his whole army south and, after long sieges, managed to conquer Bijāpūr first (1686), then the weaker but richer Golconda (1687).[34] The Marathas, however, were an enemy of another kind. Shambhaji and his successor Rājarām resembled coordinators of robber bands more than rulers in the Mughal sense. The Maratha armies typically consisted of several small bands who fought for their own profit and could unite or disperse. They lived on plunder and tribute for protection (*chauth*, literally 'quarter', i.e. one quarter of the tax yield). They could not dare confront the Mughal army openly, but took to guerrilla tactics and to robbing the Mughal baggage train.[35] Thus when the Mughals captured and executed Shambhaji in 1689 the problem was not solved.[36] Not only was Rājarām repeatedly pursued and besieged in vain, but the Maratha generals also acted independently of him. Aurangzeb, already in his seventies, developed a stubborn resolve to put them down at all costs, probably in order to repair the loss of image that they had inflicted on the institution of the emperor. Aurangzeb's contemporaries were well aware that he was neglecting his responsibility to

[29] Richards (1993a: 264 f).

[30] Qazvīnī, fol. 53 b.

[31] Sarkar (1973: 13–82).

[32] Ibid.:149–153, 168.

[33] Pearson (1977: 226–232).

[34] Sarkar (1973: 262–326).

[35] Gordon (1977: 6 f). The *chauth* was one quarter of the district's *jāgīr* income, hence the name.

[36] Sarkar (1973: 341–344, 346 f).

protect his subjects and that this was detrimental to the empire, as the memoirs of the secretary Bhimsen Saxena Kayasth show.[37]

Mughal wars included enticing away the enemy's generals, offering generous employment for those who changed sides. Aurangzeb practiced this on a very large scale. However, the emperor needed *jāgīrs* to employ people. But the assignable land (Persian: *paibāqī*) had shrunk considerably, and Aurangzeb and his father had increased crown lands to almost one-fifth of the entire country.[38] In the newly conquered areas of Bijāpūr and Golconda, Aurangzeb took all the good land (in Golconda 44%). Of the rest, he assigned about one-third to his administrators there, and used the rest for his war. The remaining lands were not assigned to the old elite of the sultanates despite their enrolment, nor to Aurangzeb's soldiers or officers in North India to manage the problems there. North India was left alone and had to do without the government. This, of course, meant that the governors in the north tried to keep the taxes for themselves and did not remit them to the court. Moreover, the new lands often did not yield enough to support the number of soldiers that they were assigned for, and plunder was ruining their value further. Officers were therefore dismissed and the army shrank. Soldiers were demoralised and malnourished, also because the Marathas were robbing them whenever they could. Moreover, the huge Mughal army was not accustomed to besieging forts in hilly jungle terrain, where moving thousands of men was difficult and surprise attacks were easy.[39] In addition to this, the generals saw their income decline and were afraid that they would be dismissed should peace break out. Therefore, they prolonged the war, did not attack when they could, and struck up secret agreements with the enemy.[40] The war was therefore not 'decided' at all, rather the Marathas had survived it by the death of Aurangzeb in 1707.[41]

Aurangzeb could have employed local warriors, but he did not. There is evidence that the Mughal soldiers had a deep prejudice against Deccani warriors. They regarded them as barbarian, ugly, and filthy, and as despicable turncoats without a sense of honour.[42] In any case, those who knew the terrain and had control over the peasants were not employed after the conquest of Golconda, and deprived of any employment, they turned to robbery.[43] The war thus created many more rebels than it could put down. What seemed to be rebels and robbers in the eyes of the Mughal officers were evolving new states, and those that managed to establish themselves later strove to end robbery and set up order.[44]

[37] Richards (1993a: 276 f).

[38] Athar Ali (2011: 74).

[39] Richards (1976: 248–251).

[40] Athar Ali (2001: 92).

[41] Gordon (1977: 6).

[42] Richards (1976: 245 f).

[43] Ibid.: 255.

[44] For example the Marathas after they had infiltrated the province of Malwa in the 1730s and early 1730s, and had taken it over legally after the Battle of Bhopal in 1738, cf. Gordon (1977: 36).

In short, Aurangzeb accelerated the tendency of decentralization that was already present at his accession. Most of all, he failed to control his old territories by leaving them alone. It would have been better if he had returned to the north, cared for the affairs there and assigned the conquest to his sons.[45] This was what his father had done with him when he delegated the conquest of the Deccan to him. Aurangzeb's decision to give more importance to the war than to consolidate the new territories and stabilize the old ones made it necessary for officers to remain in their territories and care for them and for income for their soldiers. Between them, new contestants for power from former rebel groups had asserted themselves. Aurangzeb died in 1707 at age 89. After a war of succession, his son Muʿaẓẓam, already 63 years old, was crowned Emperor Bahādur Shah.

6 The Rise of Successor States and the Political System of the Eighteenth Century

By 1707, the overextended and increasingly unregulated empire already showed signs of disintegration. Bahādur Shah moved to North India, trying to tackle the problems there. But he died five years later, too short a time for reconquering large parts of the empire and enforcing a new effective compromise between the court, the officers and the *zamīndārs*. The tendency of regionalization therefore prevailed, and the officers managed to enforce them at court. This was assisted by steep economic growth, which benefitted the innovative officers more than the conservative, hierarchy-minded emperor. According to Muzaffar Alam, the breakup of the Mughal Empire can be divided into the following four phases:

6.1 1707–13: Impossibility of Reasserting Centralized Power over both Rebels and Officers

The short reign of Bahādur Shah (1707–1712) and his eldest son Jahāndār Shah (1712–13) did not bring about changes, though the emperor gave up the Deccan War. An attempt to quell the Rajput rebellion failed, as well as that of the Sikhs, who were removing Mughal officials from their territory in a quest for independence. The emperor tried to keep the nobles in check by promoting many small officers to high ranks, which, however, alienated the old nobility. His measures to facilitate a steady income from the provinces were resisted by the provincial officials and the great nobles seeking to stay in power in their province.[46] Therefore, the 'king mechanism' of creating two conflicting groups of dependent officials and becoming their indispensable arbitrator[47] did not work with Bahādur Shah because he failed to make the two groups dependent upon him. The traditional notion that the nobles

[45] Gommans (2002: 101 f).

[46] Alam (2001: 20–27).

[47] Elias (2002: 44, 301).

were the emperor's 'devoted slaves' whose authority and income depended entirely on the emperor hampered the emperor's realization that reality was now something very different.[48] This was true also true for his successors.[49] In Avadh, families of state pensioners (e.g. judges, policemen and reporters to the court) had become rich enough to engage in large-scale revenue farming, moneylending, and buying up *zamīndār* lands, the income of which was then lost for the state.[50] Meanwhile, nobles could depend on their power bases in the provinces as much as on the emperor, a notion that was alien to Mughal state theory, and the state pensioners began to work for the provincial official instead of the central authority.[51] Moreover, Bahadur Shah could not curb the officers' ambitions as rigorously as necessary because he needed them in the wars against his brother Kām Bakhsh (until January 1709), the Sikhs, the Rajputs, and the Marathas. Also, the only way to gain more revenue would have been to alter agricultural society itself on a large scale, which still consisted largely of clans of free small-scale farmers.[52] While tax-farming (*ijara*) by local nobles and banks was on the rise,[53] the centre was not in a position to introduce it everywhere now. The prospect of income from new conquests had become a matter of the past.[54]

6.2 1713–22: Power Struggles Weaken the Centre while the Provinces Assert Themselves

The Emperors Farrukhsiyar (1713–19), Rafi ud-Darjat and Shah Jahan II in 1719, and the early reign of Muhammad Shah from September 1719 were dominated by the Sayyid brothers, Sayyid ʿAbdullāh Barhā and Sayyid ʿAlī Khān Barhā. They had been generals of Bahadur Shah and became the most powerful men at court in 1713, installing and deploying emperors at will. In order to counterbalance the Sayyid brothers, Emperor Farrukhsiyar granted privileges to nobles that supported him, like control over the provincial finances. Thinking in terms of promotion for loyal service only, the notion of individual power bases evaded the emperor's mind as before, but meanwhile the process of establishing power bases had become irreversible.[55] Moreover, politics at court were dominated by the power struggles of the factions of nobles, with the emperor being much weaker than the Sayyid Brothers and the leaders of other factions. The concentration

[48] Alam (2001: 23 f).
[49] Ibid.: 66.
[50] Ibid.: 110–117.
[51] Ibid.: 15.
[52] Bayly (2002: 38 f.).
[53] Bayly (2002: 41).
[54] Alam (2001: 28–31).
[55] Ibid.: 66.

of the court on the politics of the northern provinces, of the imperial army on fighting rebels, and later the Sayyid Brothers in the north, helped the Marathas to overcome their crisis of succession and consolidate their power in the south.[56] In 1722, Emperor Muhammad Shah overcame and executed the Sayyid brothers with the help of Chīn Qilich Khan, who later founded the Nizam dynasty of Hyderabad. However, he already lacked sufficient strength to enforce his will on the officers.

Rebellions were widespread in these nine years due to two severe droughts. It does not seem to have been sheer despair, though, because the reports of great plundering imply leaders powerful enough to organize and arm sizeable gangs. This led government officials to avoid transferring, and to accumulating land close to their home to an even greater extent than before.[57] Especially at lower levels of the state, *jāgīrs* were granted for a lifetime (*vaṭan jāgīr* = home assignment), and holders of older 'home assignments' were allowed to extend them. This was done to allow the holders to maintain order where the centre was unable to do so. The imperial court accepted the shift in balance of power away from the centre because it feared to lose control entirely.[58] Additionally, tax farming (*ijāra*) became widespread and led to even important offices becoming purchasable rather than depending on the emperor's grace and plans, and to an even greater exploitation of the peasantry.[59]

6.3 1722–39: Independent Provinces and Rebel States Establish their Own Systems; The Emperor Is Reduced to a Symbol of Authority

By 1722, only fifteen years after the death of Aurangzeb, we can speak of successor states[60] with the emperor as their ceremonial head. The governors took titles that implied subordination, like Navāb ('representative') or Niẓām ('administrator'), and drew upon the emperor to acknowledge their titles for a fee. But they ruled independently, seeing the emperor as an ally against rivals and others, when suitable, and siding against him when that, too, was suitable. Orders of the emperor were only taken when they were advantageous; even dismissals were ignored without consequences. However, the officers took part in the power struggle at the court in Delhi in order to assert their position.[61] Examples of such effectively independent provinces were Avadh, Bengal, and the Niẓām's dominions. Likewise, subordinate officers strove to establish a power base at the county and village level, and withheld taxes too.[62] The provincial governors therefore had to reach new

[56] Bhargava (2014: xxxviii).
[57] Alam (2001: 31–35).
[58] Ibid.: 124–133.
[59] Alam (2001: 40).
[60] Ibid.: 14.
[61] Ibid.: 308–310.
[62] Ibid.: 15.

agreements, and many now appreciated employing the rebels in 'home taxholdings' and formalizing decentralization.[63] They reformed administration in various ways: Bengal abolished the *jāgīr* system and centralized revenue; Avadh kept the *jāgīrs* but farmed out the tax to officers with a local base, who stayed in place; the Niẓām did roughly the same.[64] In this way, the provincial governors created the order that the emperor was unable to create.[65] In effect, the officers were not 'devoted slaves' of the emperor any longer, rather the emperor was a servant to their interests. But as the theoretical source of all power, he still represented the unity of all powers, his orders legitimized matters that officers, or rebels, had achieved before,[66] so that they could assert their own claims against a rival's interest.[67]

New rebel states emerged together with effectively independent provinces. The Marathas, the Sikhs, the Jats, and Afghan soldiers of fortune founded several states. Though detested by Mughal writers as boorish, and often behaving as such, they grew to control the countryside in the 1730s and, ultimately the cities too. The Sikhs led the way in ousting the Mughal system. After infiltrating and plundering the province of Malwa for more than ten years, the Marathas defeated the Mughal army in 1737 and forced the emperor to legalize their tenure of the Malwa province. They then reorganized the province as a centralized state without *jāgīrs* and a strict separation of military and administration. They also supported new cities, while the old Mughal centres of trade fell into decline.[68]

6.4 1739–48: Destruction of the Centre

The sack of Delhi by Nāder Shah of Iran in 1739 reduced the resources of Delhi and the Mughal Emperor to nearly nothing. Moreover, Nāder had overcome a Mughal army six times his own using advanced firearms—especially batteries of musketeers, which showed that Mughal warfare was outdated. Muhammad Shah's efforts to raise a new army failed due to the lack of resources in spite of several nobles investing in it.[69] The Afghan raids of India weakened the Punjab even further. Muhammad Shah died in 1748, leaving a bankrupt empire, and the following rulers were puppets of Awadh, then of the Marathas, and finally of the British when they occupied Delhi in 1803. From then on, the Mughal Empire existed only in name, with an emperor that was no longer a political player, but a symbolic figure that stood for the legitimacy of the various successor states.

[63] Ibid.: 50.
[64] Athar Ali (2006: 344).
[65] Alam (2001: 208).
[66] Ibid.: 50.
[67] Ibid.: 54.
[68] Gordon (1977: 6–15, 35–38).
[69] Alam (2001: 51–55).

7 British Expansion and the End of the System of Successor States

It is to be noted that European trade companies did not have a hand in the disintegration. An indirect influence of the Spanish silver trade from South America into India that facilitated the monetization of the Indian economy, or of the growing luxury cloth exports from India to Europe,[70] are difficult to prove, though Athar Ali has tried this rather unconvincingly.[71] Although the Dutch, the British and the French had been present as trade companies in India since the early seventeenth century, the rise of British power in India began in the 1740s, when the Mughal emperor ceased to be an independent political power. The British East India Company had taken control of Bengal and its taxes after the Battle of Plassey in 1747. It had therefore become one of the states struggling for power in India, though it was legally a trade company. Since becoming enemies to the French in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748), the British also had to compete with the French, who introduced line infantry with well-drilled Indian musketeers in India, a weapon that made traditional Indian cavalry warfare futile and cost less. Paris, however, wanted its trade company to conduct trade, reduced support for its warfare and, consequently, lost most of its Indian possessions to the British in the Seven Years' War (1756–1763). The Third Battle of Panipat in 1761, won by the Afghans over the Marathas, prevented the consolidation of the Marathas into an empire and ensured that the British would not face a superior enemy. The navāb of Āvadh, now the greatest military power in India, attacked the British at Buxar (Bāksar) in 1764 together with the Imperial and the Bengal army, but all three armies were routed, also because of lacking coordination. The British winning the Battle of Buxar resulted in Emperor Shah Alam II legally granting the revenue of Bengal to the British East India Company. Gradually, and by reacting to the present political situations as required, the British gained control over more and more tracts of India by low-cost war. Unlike Indian rulers, the East India Company needed to be profitable even in war, and closely controlled war. Moreover, it needed to be successful as a company, not as a single commander, and relied on teaching and sharing strategy, not on military genius. It did not take over easily, but had equal adversaries in the Marathas, the Sikhs, and Tipu Sultan of Mysore. The British could have been ousted by an alliance of these three, but this never happened. All of them were rulers that no longer drew on Mughal tradition. Tipu Sultan even relied on French models of governance and warfare, introduced gun factories, a mercantilist economy and direct taxation of all subjects. His defeat in 1799 definitively ended French influence in India and made the British lords of South India and the remaining princes their vassals. The Second Anglo-Maratha War 1803–1805 also gave the British the upper hand over the Marathas and rule over the Mughal heartland in Delhi and Agra. We can therefore claim that the British became the dominant power in India in the first years of the nineteenth century. The Sikhs maintained independence under their

[70] Prakash (2004: 312 f.).

[71] Athar Ali (2006: 338–340).

ruler Ranjit Singh (1780–1839), who had modernized his army according to European models, but his quarrelling successors were overcome by the British in 1847.[72] Formally, the British acted in the name of the emperor, but he was their pensioner after 1803. After the great uprising in 1857, the inadequacy of a trade company ruling a vast country was felt in England. Therefore, the British parliament passed the Government of India Act of 1858, by which India became a British crown colony, the East India Company was dissolved, and the last Mughal emperor deposed and sent into exile to Burma.

8 Conclusion

The decentralization of the Mughal Empire can serve as a prime example for the disintegration of an empire from within. It is hard to speak of a decline of the whole empire, given the economic boom that the provinces profited from, but we can speak of a decline of Mughal central authority. The development was triggered by the very structure of power and taxation in the Mughal Empire that put the officials in a conflict between loyalty to the centre and their profit from their region. Rebellions by the landed gentry, who benefitted from the growing economy, would have occurred anyway, but the reaction of the emperor and the officers to it show that they thought in terms of hierarchy, not income, and failed to see that new arrangements were necessary. When the officers finally understood the gentry's improved position, they no longer had an interest in passing the profit on to the emperor. The existing decentralization was greatly accelerated by the overextension in Aurangzeb's wars, which Aurangzeb refused to tackle, and by the nobles and the gentry, who reacted to it to their own advantage, not to that of the centre, and were often left to help themselves as the war dragged on.

It was finalized in the first half of the eighteenth century by the rebels and robbers fighting for themselves and later for a dominion, by the officers establishing their own rule in the provinces, and by the emperors who thought in terms of loyalty instead of power bases and other sources of capital. Discourses of power therefore played as significant a role as resources did: Aurangzeb's Deccan war ended as a stalemate because the restoration of his imperial honour had priority over consolidating the new lands, and later emperors were so accustomed to the traditional role of the emperor that they failed to realize that their officers were transforming it. Thus politics, like card games, is not only about having trumps and gaining points, but about how the cards are played: about agreed rules, changeable conventions, personal skill, and luck. The fiction of the emperor as the ultimate source of all authority indeed prevailed until the British deposed the last emperor to Burma, even if the British tended to see him as a fool after 1803. In order to keep the empire their own, the emperors of the eighteenth century would have had to abandon all disputed territory, reorganize the rest, gather a well-equipped and well-paid army, and reconquer

[72] Kulke and Rothermund (1998: 22 [German original 1982: 298 f.]).

India anew, and that against rulers who would have been well-established in the meantime. The result would surely not have resembled the old Mughal Empire anymore.

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How Do Empires Fall? Two Case Studies from Pre-Modern Southeast Asia

Tilman Frasch

1 Introduction

The question how and why imperial states declined or ended is an essential part of the historical investigation centred on the state and its development, and has therefore much ink spilt over it, both as a conclusion to case studies and by way of theoretical (and sometimes comparative) considerations, for which the current volume presents another attempt.[1] The causes most commonly held responsible for this decline, fall, demise or sunset of an empire,[2] and especially for the two case studies under consideration here, include the following:

Dynastic Decline This factor takes its origin in the notion that an empire is defined through (and often held together by) the persona of the emperor, who possesses some sort of superhuman or divine powers – "charisma" in Max Weber's analysis of social

[1] The classical study in this regard is Gibbon (1776-1788); The title chosen by Gibbon has since been taken over for numerous further studies, not last on the British Empire. See e.g. Ferguson (2002), Brendon (2007); or Kennedy (2017). Also see Gehler and Rollinger (2014) as well as Rahn Philips (2016) for considerations upon the usefulness of "empire" as a framework for analysis.

[2] This list has been culled from the suggestions made by the editors of this volume as far as found relevant for the two case studies under consideration here. Longer and more detailed sets of criteria are of course possible, see e. g. Nolte (2008): 5-18.

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power[3] – to underpin his military and political prowess. Such qualities are double-edged, as their loss, shown e.g. by way of economic failure, natural disasters or even bodily defects, will turn against the person of the ruler and the popular belief in his superior power. The personal qualities of the ruler tend to be more important in pre-modern than in modern societies and are therefore often referred to in contemporary historical works as a cause of imperial decline. However, this greater importance in the past should not suggest that it is still a useful tool to analyse and explain the decline of an empire today.

Religious Change This factor assumes the necessity of a double religious homogeneity, one across and among the people, and one between the people and the court. Diving lines can therefore run both horizontally – when the ruler assumes a different creed, which is not shared and accepted by the people – and vertically, when a new belief becomes so popular among the people that it poses a challenge to both the hitherto dominant (or even monopolistic creed) and the ruler who benefits politically from its patronage. In the Western world, the introduction of Christianity into the Roman Empire and the Reformation are to well-known cases to illustrate this process; in Asia, Ashoka's alleged conversion to Buddhism (or at least the various anti-Brahmanical stipulations made in his edicts)[4] and, as this article will explore, the religious landscape of Angkor in the thirteenth century, are comparable examples.

Over-Exploitation of Natural and Human Resources The unequal distribution of economic resources is part of the very nature of an empire, and they are geared towards sustaining and increasing the power of the centre, both the capital city and its political elite. This requires the conquered regions to contribute constantly and disproportionately to the centre, but as agricultural production and human power are both limited, increasing the demand on them by the centre may eventually lead to over-exploitation and a possible economic collapse in parts of the empire.[5] The survival of the empire will then depend on the centre's ability to overcome rebellions, which are often related to socio-economic formations on the brink of collapse, as well to expand further in order to compensate internal economic losses with fresh external resources.

[3] Weber (1968): 9-68. Weberian categories are distinctly Western, but have their equivalents in Eastern societies such as those in Myanmar or Cambodia.

[4] See Thapar (1997). Whilst Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism appears to be a construct of the much later Buddhist chronicles from Sri Lanka, it is clear that the king visited several of the sites associated with the Buddha (Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Lumbini) and took a lively interest in the affairs of the Buddhist monks order (*sangha*) of the day. An interesting feature is the king's attempt to construct a kind of imperial state ideology, for which he employs the term *dhamma*. This *dhamma*-ideology is inspired by both the Hindu *dharma* and the Buddhist *dhamma*, but detaches both from their religious connotations to proclaim his imperial *dhamma* as a secular form of morality and good citizenship. The notion of a "dhamma imperialism" seems to be a fitting term for this attempt by the king.

[5] This notion of imperial overstretch is central to the work of Kennedy (1994).

Imperial Overstretch or "Imperial Erosion" This cause is closely related to the above, when continuous conquests, no matter if driven by an imperial agenda or economic need, result in the acquisition of economically less viable region, which do not contribute to the empire's finances and may not even pay off the costs incurred on the campaign leading to their conquest. Another form of imperial overstretch is the imperial erosion or "fission", which refers to forms of resistance to the centre forming in the provinces or peripheral areas of the empire. Imperial overstretch occurs when the intensity of the imperial power, typically exerted through a centralized bureaucracy, wanes or disappears completely and the distance between the centre and the places where such centrifugal forces are at work prevents the centre to intervene swiftly or effectively. [6] Such attempts to break free often emphasize a difference in language, race or religion to mobilize support, while successful leaders of these movements may derive their own personal credentials from copying the emperor's paraphernalia or acts to symbolically transfer the social power coming with them. Several of such break-away movements occurring in a temporal or causal sequence will result in the fragmentation or erosion of an empire.

Military Defeat Although empires often decline or end in conjunction with a military defeat, it seems hard to consider such defeat as the sole reason for the fall, as it may stem from underlying structural problems of the centre such as a lack of economic or demographic resources or imperial overstretch, as discussed above. In addition, a military defeat, unless immediately remedied, will inevitably cast a shadow on the emperor's individual qualities. A defeat caused by factors beyond the emperor's control can on the one hand confirm his fall from divine grace and consumption of his superhuman powers, whereas it does not necessarily indicate dynastic decline as such, as another member of the royal family may seize power and start another cycle of (re)conquest and empire-building. Therefore, the reason to include military defeat in this list of factors exploring the decline is because it marks the moment on an empire's time scale from where proceed backwards in search for any underlying structural reasons.

Natural Disaster and Contingency Military defeat as a manifestation of the emperor's "bad luck" and caused by factors beyond his command poses the more general question whether natural factors at large may eventually cause the fall of an empire. These natural factors can work either on a relatively long time-scale – thinking of climatic changes to contagious diseases – or take instant (though often massive) effect, for example earthquakes or volcanic eruptions, and of course they can form a mixture of both.[7] The

[6] For fission, see Cohen (1981). Building on Cohen's concept, Wink has applied the notion of "splitting" from the centre (*fitna*) to Indian history (e.g. Wink 2002, 198-199). It must be noted, however, that Wink employs this term, which is moreover hardly ever found in his sources, in a rather arbitrary and vague manner to describe virtually any form of disobedient or evasive behaviour.

[7] Buckley & Lieberman 2012. The striking of a meteor and other such extremely rare events can safely be ignored here.

likely consequences of climatic change will be felt hardest by agrarian societies including those in monsoon Asia, even though a broad variety of irrigation systems, usually sponsored by the state or the ruler provide a degree of protection for the people and their livelihoods. Natural disasters in general and irregularities of temperature and rainfall more particularly tend to affect states and empires based on a well-developed agriculture more than marginal areas where animal husbandry and possibly nomadic life-styles prevail, giving the latter an edge when a conflict arises. Contagious diseases in contrast may spread anywhere and affect imperial centres, peripheries and areas outside the state to similar degrees, though again people dwelling in areas hit by disease may negatively impact upon warfare directly and upon economic success indirectly (e.g. when hydraulic works are neglected), is self-evident.

In regard of its Southeast Asian context, from where the case studies will be drawn, this article will continue to make use of Kulke's terminology and speak of 'imperial kingdoms' rather than of 'empires'.[8] This choice of terms serves to acknowledge the political, economic and cultural influence the two major 'imperial' powers of Asia, India and China, exerted over Southeast Asia and its states before 1500 CE.[9] Rearding the case studies presented here, the focus will be on the two land-borne states of Bagan (which has already formed the subject of a previous contribution to this series)[10] and Angkor, and hence the period between c. 800 and 1250 CE (for Angkor) and 1050 to 1300 (for Bagan).[11] It should be noted, however, that recent findings made by way of radar scanning in the area between Eastern Baray of Angkor and the Kulen hills in the northeast of the city have substantial increased the size of the urban area. Once properly explored, these sites may require scholars to revise some of the received wisdom regarding the Angkorian state.

The third Southeast Asian polity that may qualify as an 'imperial kingdom', the sea-borne state of Sri Vijaya, will be mentioned only very briefly here, as it may have to

[8] Kulke (1986); Münkler's (2005). Distinction between "Weltreich" (global empire) and "Großreich" (empire) points in a similar direction.

[9] It should be clear that China indeed formed an empire during this period and exerted some form of political (and possibly economic) suzerainty over Southeast Asia, as demonstrated by the numerous tributary missions sent to the Chinese court by Southeast Asian rulers, see Bielenstein (2005); In contrast, it is difficult to find an Indian 'empire' in the period between c. 300 and 1500 CE (with the Guptas being perhaps the closest approximation to one), but India's cultural influence – commonly referred to as the Indianization of Southeast Asia – is undeniable. It can be found in the areas of religion (including architecture and art), language and scripts, as well as calendars and astronomy. India's cultural influence in Southeast Asia has led (mainly Indian) scholars to speak of Indian colonies in the East, see esp. Majumdar (1944); though further research has argued in favour of a stronger agency of Southeast Asian rulers and people as well as a simultaneity of developments in India and Southeast Asia. Kulke (2005).

[10] Frasch (2019).

[11] Seminal works on Bagan include Than Tun (1978); Aung-Thwin (1985); Frasch (1996); and Stadtner (2005). For Angkor, see Higham (2001), Jacques and Lafond (2007), and Fletcher et al. (2015).

be regarded as a federation of port cities – a kind of "Hanseatic League of the East" – rather than a formal state (let alone empire).[12] The only feature to speak in favour of an empire is a set of inscriptions from the late seventh century CE, found in the vicinity of Palembang (Sumatra), which mention the conquests by a ruler called Jayanasa. Among these inscriptions is the snake-hooded Telaka Batu inscription, which records an oath of allegiance to be taken by those under the sway of the Sri Vijayan ruler. These men virtually had to "drink the oath of allegiance", as the act of submission is called in several Southeast Asian languages, with water being poured over the inscription stone to be collected from a sprout at the bottom of the stone.[13] Moreover, the South Indian king Rajaraja launched a maritime campaign against Sri Vijaya and several of its allied ports in 1025 CE, the aim of which has often been seen as an attempt to open up the sea routes to Southeast Asia and China for the merchant communities from South India.[14] Another 200 years later, in the early thirteenth century, a Javanese ruler claimed to have finally defeated the remnants of Sri Vijaya.[15] Virtually all other references for Sri Vijaya between the seventh and the thirteenth centuries come from Chinese documents recording tributary missions from or ethnographic descriptions of the area, but there is little to be found in them to suggest that Sri Vijaya was still thriving. For that reason, Sri Vijaya will be omitted from this investigation. Instead, the focus will be put on the two land-borne states of Bagan and Angkor in order to discuss which of the reasons listed above, individually or in conjunction, can be seen as responsible for their decline and eventual end. II.

2 Dynastic Decline

Neither Angkor nor Bagan did have clear rules or traditions concerning royal succession. An overriding principle appears to have been to allow the pretender best suited – if only by determination and ruthlessness – to succeed to the throne. The list of potential successors usually included the first-born son, the son born from the chief queen or any son the king had made crown-prince (*yuvaraja*) during his lifetime. This constellation was of course prone to lead to contested successions (which would on occasion involve contenders from outside the royal family as well), but the conception of kingship shared among Southeast Asia catered for this situation by attributing the qualities deemed essential for kingship to the person who emerged victorious from a contested succession.[16] Once the required rituals of kingship such as the *abhisheka* (or consecration) had been performed, the new king was

[12] For the term and a recent assessment of Sri Vijaya, see Kulke (2016).

[13] Coedès (1968): 83.

[14] For a recent assessment of this strike by an Indian maritime force, see Kulke et al. (2009).

[15] Coedès (1968): ch. 11.

[16] For the case of Bagan, see Aung-Thwin (1983).

to be accepted by the court and the people. It is against this backdrop that the potential impact of a dynastic change or rise of a new lineage will have to be assessed.

In Angkor, the first major change took place just after 1000 CE, when Suryavarman I became king. Though loosely related to the former dynasty, he appears to have been more of an outsider whose succession was challenged by at least one contender and possibly came at the end of a civil war. In the style of previous kings, Suryavarman determined the site of his royal seat (and hence the political centre of the kingdom) by moving to Yashodapura, and soon afterwards embarked upon a major construction program not just in the Angkor urban area but also outside of it.[17] Given this ostentatious continuity and subsequent further flourishing of the kingdom, nothing suggests that the transition to Suryavarman's rule had a negative influence on the stability of the Angkor kingdom.

Unfortunately, almost nothing is known of the rulers who succeeded Jayavarman VII after his death around 1220 CE, as there is a general lack of records (epigraphic or other) for most of thirteenth century Cambodia. This precludes any serious investigation of possible links between dynastic decline and the decline of the kingdom, which took place during that period.

The kingdom of Bagan experienced at least one dynastic change and one contested succession each before the 1280s. The former came early in the day, at the end of the eleventh century, when a military leader usurped the throne in a moment of general peril. King Kyanzittha (1184-1112/3) seems to have been a complete outsider, even though the later chroniclers of the country attempted to construe a narrative of dynastic continuity by making him a lesser son of king Anawrahta, the founder of 'imperial' Bagan.[18] The details of the most contested succession at Bagan, which brought king Kyazwa (1235-1249 CE) to the throne, are also known only vaguely. He was definitely a son – possibly even the oldest son – of king Nadaungmya (1211-?1230/1), but what happened during his father's final years is unclear. The initial regulating of the succession seems to have failed, to trigger a contest among various factions of the royal family that led to Kyazawa become king. Soon after his coronation in August 1235, the king took the unusual step to revoke all fiefs handed out by his predecessor(s) and transferred them to his supporters. This quite drastic measure would seem to indicate that the succession of Kyazwa had made feelings run high; however, the rather swift return to normality, as evidenced by a host of religious constructions and endowments throughout the reign, make clear that the disruptions seen at the top of the state had no bearing on its structure or political stability.[19]

Of greater importance were the events surrounding the last king of imperial Bagan, Narasihapati, in the face of the Mongol invasion during the 1280s. Instead of fighting back the enemy, the king fled the capital city and hid on the west bank of the Irawadi river – and

[17] Higham: 91-97; Coedès (1968): 134-139.

[18] For his career, see Luce (1966); The king seems to have taken extra steps to enhance his status, e.g. by sending delegations to the centres of Buddhism in India as well as a tributary mission to China, to gain recognition from the Chinese Emperor, see Frasch (1996): 97-100.

[19] Frasch (1996): 126-136.

act that earned him the contemporary epithet Tayokpye (or "the king who fled from the Turks [Mongols]"). The city was eventually taken over and occupied by the Mongols, while the king was assassinated in a power struggle that broke out among his sons and various court factions. However, as the king had violated the code of conduct for kings (*rajadhamma*) by abandoning his capital and failing to protect his people, he had forfeited his life and position, and accordingly this regicide was perceived as justified by contemporaries and later chroniclers alike. Yet whereas the concept of kingship remained intact, the king's cowardice affected the capital city directly, removing its sacro-cosmic qualities that had set it above any city in the kingdom. The successors of Narasihapati abandoned Bagan and established new political centres outside Bagan (with Ava emerging as the new capital after1364), though the city did retain a degree of its former importance as a centre of Buddhist monasticism and scholarship.[20]

3 Religious Change

The kings of Bagan, along with the vast majority of the Myanmar people, were Theravada Buddhists (or at least Buddhists of a brand that roughly corresponds to our modern understanding of the term, acknowledging that religions aren't static) and remained so for the whole Bagan period (and in fact until the end of the nineteenth century, when the last king of Myanmar was deposed by the British). The kings of Bagan supported and protected the order of monks (sangha) and the religion as a whole, on the hand through material support and on the other through symbolic actions such as sponsoring religious ceremonies and rebuilding important monuments such as the Mahabodhi Frasch 2017 and 2019; Luce and U Pe Maung Tin 1923: 154. Of course, they did also employ the service of brahmins for court rituals,[21] and moreover Hindu gods and cults did have their place at the Bagan, as the Nat-hlaung-kyaung (Vishnu) and Nanpaya temples (Brahma) illustrate. But overall, the religious structure at Bagan was settled and widely static from the late eleventh century, ruling out religious change as a cause for the fall of the kingdom.

The situation at Angkor was almost fundamentally different because of the notable gap between the predominant royal cult, which was Hinduist in outlook, and the religious persuasion of the majority of the population who seem to have been Buddhists. To begin with the former, the monuments of Angkor were usually dedicated to a Hindu god and their decoration replete with scenes taken from Indian classical literature and epics. Moreover, the ceremonies underpinning kingship at Angkor normally followed or copied rituals performed for Hindu gods, in which Brahmins had a central part. Central to them was the *devaraja* cult, which constituted a relationship between the king and the supra-natural

[20] Frasch (2002): 53-57.

[21] Notably king Kyanzittha in the inauguration ceremony of the new palace, see Luce (1969-1970): 64-71.

world of gods and spirits. Although historians are still unable to agree on what this cult exactly looked like – it seems to have required the establishment of a new centre of the kingdom, where a statue and/or the holy fire were moved and perhaps a temple was built, all embedded in an elaborate ritual performed by Brahmins[22] – the scope and elaboration of the ritual suggest that participation in it was limited to the upper stratum of society, excluding the majority of the people. The all-encompassing nature of the *devaraja* cult also makes it hard to establish the everyday religiosity of the people. The veneration of ancestors seems to have been quite common, and there are also hints that Buddhism may have enjoyed a degree of popularity among the common folk.[23]

The crucial religious change came with king Jayavarman VII, who became a Buddhist and integrated Buddhist ideas of kingship into the *devaraja* cult. On the one hand, he rolled out a scheme of public welfare, including the building of hospitals and rest-houses, that resembled the deeds the Indian king Ashoka Maurya, the exemplary Buddhist ruler; on the other hand he added the famous facial towers to the monuments he built. Possibly bearing the king's own face, they can be understood as representing "the seeing all and knowing everything, which is omniscience", an essential quality of the Buddha. However, rather than causing a rift between the king and the people (and hence forming a cause of decline, as outlined above), this religious change of heart may have actually brought him closer to his people – assuming that they had already begun to develop an inclination towards Buddhism. In addition, the neighbouring Bagan kingdom, where Theravada was thriving, may have formed the vital powerhouse for the dissemination of Buddhism across Southeast Asia. But whatever the causes of the spread of Buddhism and the royal conversion were,[24] it seems unlikely that they made more than a minor contribution to the decline of the kingdom in the thirteenth century.

4 Over-Exploitation of Resources and Imperial Overstretch

But whereas Jayavarman VII's religious conversion per se may not have caused much disruption, his reign appears to have been a turning point in terms of squeezing the kingdom's natural and human resources. At the end of the twelfth century, the construction of religious monuments and irrigation works at Angkor had been going on for centuries,

[22] For the debate about the *devaraja* cult, see (among others) Mabbett (1969); Kulke (1978); Jacques (1985); and Woodward (2001).

[23] The popular religious cults in the Angkor kingdom seem to have combined ancestor worship with animistic cults referring to natural spirits and deities. It is unclear how far Indic religions such as the various Buddhist traditions or Hinduism were spread among the people as the visibility of popular belief systems is limited by the state cult practised at the court.

[24] Similar to the debate about the nature of the *devaraja* cult, historians' exploration of the spread of Buddhism in Angkor has not yielded convincing explanations yet, despite a growing body of literature. See Chandler (2004): 65-69, 80-82; Harris (2005): ch. 1; Sharrock (2009).

putting pressure on both human labour and natural environment. During that century alone, two of the kingdom's largest monuments had been constructed, Angkor Wat (1130) and the even bigger Bayon (1180s). Moreover, Jayavarman VII built the Ta Prohm and Preah Khan temples, the hospitals and rest houses already mentioned, and not to forget he was also responsible for the creation of a network of roads that linked the capital to the provinces.[25]

The building materials, mostly sandstone and laterite blocks, could be sourced in the immediate hinterland of the city and were transported on the extensive network of water channels by way light craft. There are clues that by the twelfth century the ongoing construction programme not only led to a shortage of suitable sandstone but also to a decline of the artistic quality of the stone-cut decorations;[26] and more importantly the labour force at the capital had to be increased to cope with the rising demand for work. Part of this demand would have been met through prisoners of war, taken in the campaigns against the Mon cities of (modern-day) Thailand and the wars against the Cham; but increasingly the Khmer population of the kingdom too was forced to settle at the capital.[27] Given the sheer size of the city (even without the extensions recently identified by radar scanning) and the numerous traces of human settlement found all over its area and especially within the temple compounds, the claim that Angkor's population will have been in the vicinity of one million does not seem unreasonable.[28]

The population alone, however sizable it may have been, did probably not pose an economic problem to the state in itself, as the livelihood of the people was rather simple. A bowl of rice prepared in plain clay pots over open fire, enriched with vegetables and perhaps fish from the lake nearby, formed their staple diet; huts made of bamboo with thatched roofs and daub-and-wattle walls provided shelter; simple canoes or dug-outs took them around; and on occasion alcohol made from the juice of the sugar-palm added a lighter side to life. None of these items were difficult to procure, nor did their extensive use put a notable pressure on the material resources of the kingdom.

However, it was not the economy of temple construction alone that needs to be taken into account, but also their endowment. In this regard, Jayavarman VII again exceeded the munificence exhibited by any of his predecessors by turning his works of merit into veritable small towns: He made no less than 12.500 people (among them some 615 dancers) live inside the compound of the Ta Prohm temple, and charge another 66.000 people with the supply and maintenance of the temple. Even larger figures are on the record for the Preah Khan temple, which was built a few years later. The transfer of manpower came in addition to a massive transfer of cattle and livestock as well as material resources such as rice, fruits and other foodstuff.[29] Even in a flourishing economy marked by high levels of

[25] See Hendrickson (2010).

[26] Chandler (2007): 71. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that laterite increasingly replaced sandstone in the later monuments of Angkor; Also see Auboyer (1984): 115.

[27] Chandler (2007): 77.

[28] Buckley et al. (2014): 4.

[29] See Higham (2005): 125-127 (Ta Prohm) and 127 (Preah Khan).

agricultural production (if the vast irrigation works at the capital and across the country are anything to go by) and a degree of frugality on the part of the majority of the population, such an extensive transfer of human and material resources must have caused notable economic distress.[30] It will also have limited the king's power, which was founded on his claim to be "lord of all land and water".

A similar argument of a structural crisis caused by the donations made to and kept by Buddhist temples and monasteries has been proposed in regard of Bagan.[31] Particularly the constant transfer of rice-fields deprived the king of taxable land, weakening the economic foundation of the kingdom to a point where it would collapse under the slightest pressure. Ultimately, the Mongol invasion of the kingdom in the 1280s became the straw that broke the camel's back. Even without a real military defeat, the kingdom fell and its capital Bagan ceased to be its political and ceremonial centre.

Persuasive as it sounds, however, the theory of a long structural decline caused by economic exhaustion, paving the way for the decline of Bagan has serious flaws. First of all, the calculation which claims that some 63% of the arable land had become glebe lands, owned permanently by a Buddhist 'church', by the time of the Mongol invasion was presented for the first time in 1985 and has been repeated ever since.[32] However, more than 100 new inscriptions have been discovered since then, the majority of which also record donations of land and serfs to Buddhist institutions. If these donations are added to the above calculation, the amount of glebe land would meanwhile have superseded the 80% mark. More than that, this open-ended calculation also proves that it is fundamentally flawed, because if more inscriptions with further donations of land come to light in the future, the overall amount of land donated will at one point exceed the 100% mark. In other words: more land will have been recorded as 'donated to the Buddhist church' than the overall amount of arable land available. This obvious impossibility shows that the epigraphic data for land donated cannot simply be added up, and therefore the Buddhist monasteries of the day did not combine to form a 'church', which could permanently retain all the donations it received over time. Rather, monasteries operated as separate units, and if one was deserted by its incumbent – which happened frequently, as many were inhabited

[30] The crucial point also to be considered here is whether this wealth held by a religious institution – a Buddhist temple – became indeed mortmain and, even if so, whether it retained its previous productivity. While it is clear that religious institutions were exempt from taxes (and esp. the land revenue), the fields continued to yield harvests that will have gone beyond the needs of their beneficiaries (i.e. the monks or Brahmins residing at the institution) and hence making the surplus somehow available to the rest of society. This question deserves further elaboration, which is however outside the scope of this article. An alternative view is presented by Hagesteijn (1987), who points at the growing wealth of the kingdom's aristocracy on the one hand and the difference between property owned by state temples and the growing wealth of Buddhist institutions on the other. She sees the latter as being beyond the control of the kings.

[31] Aung-Thwin (1986).

[32] Ibid.: 190; Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin (2012): 103.

by a single, hermitical monk who could not always appoint a successor – its property usually lapsed back to the family of the original donor. This is attested by a number of legal cases tried during the Bagan period, in which monks defended their rights against the descendants of the donor with that claim that they had owned and used the property in "uninterrupted succession".[33] Read against the grain, this also means that if the line of monks was interrupted, their claim was invalid and the property was restored.

5 Military Defeat

The Mongols have been mentioned in passing several times now, though they certainly deserve a separate mention as they posed the major military threat to the two Southeast Asian kingdoms – and in fact to almost any Eurasian state or empire – considered here. Genghis Khan paved the way for the conquest of China, which was accomplished by his grandson Kublai Khan, the founder of China's Yuan dynasty. Seeking further expansion, Kublai's ambitions were dampened when he launched naval attacks against Japan and Java,[34] and likewise his land-born attack on the northern part of what is now Vietnam met with strong resistance by both the Cham and Viet. The struggle of these two people, who would usually be at war with each other, was boosted by the territory of Vietnam, a series of valleys and high ridges covered with forests impeding the swift movement of the horses of the Mongol army.[35] Around 1285, the Mongols abandoned their efforts.

The simultaneous advance towards Angkor seems to have met with more success, even though little is known of the actual events. However, in 1285 the Khmer ruler sent tributes to Beijing, which suggests that he acknowledged the suzerainty of the Khan.[36] The city still flourished at that time, as described by the Chinese envoy Chou Daguan, who visited Angkor at the end of the thirteenth century.[37] But by then, building activities – already on a low since the death of Jayavarman VII around 1220 – had ceased more or less completely, and the city's water management system began to crumble.

The Mongol conquest of Bagan, in contrast again, was real conquest as far as we know. It also began with the sending of envoys demanding the submission of the Burmese king, who refused and mistreated the envoys. This prompted the Khan to invade the kingdom, and although the Burmese initially succeeded in keeping the Mongols in check, and even negotiated a truce with them through a Buddhist monk who went to Beijing, the Mongols eventually moved into Central Myanmar and occupied Bagan.[38] Their easy victory was

[33] Frasch (1996): 234-237.

[34] See Delgado (2010): (for Java ibid. 164-167).

[35] Coedès (1968): 192-193.

[36] Coedès (1968): 191-192.

[37] Zhou Daguan (2007).

[38] For Chinese records of the Mongol expansion, see Huber (1909); and Wade (2009).

facilitated by the behaviour of the Bagan king, who fled the capital instead of defending it. This flight, which earned him the contemporary "the king who fled the Taruk (Turk = Mongol)", and the dynastic struggles it provoked, were immediate outcomes of the Mongol expanse though possibly more crucial for the end of the Bagan kingdom than the actual military defeat to Mongols alone.[39]

An attempt to assess the consequences and implications of the Mongol conquests in East and Southeast Asia leads to mixed results. The actual success of their military movements is certainly questionable: they did conquer China, possibly forced Cambodia into submission, and occupied Upper Myanmar for a short time, but on the other hand, they failed to do the same in Vietnam, let alone the maritime kingdoms of Japan or Java. But their expansion did trigger other developments that destabilized the polities they attacked. Firstly, they weakened the rulers and the political structures and allegiances of these states, but often they withdrew instead of filling the political void they had created, and thus created opportunities for one of the many petty kings or even outside king with ambition and the resources to occupy this political space. Secondly, their pressure on the people along the frontier of their empire triggered waves of migrations, which are best visible with the Shan-Thai people. The thirteenth century saw the rise of the Thai states in what is modern Thailand, but the inscriptions from Bagan also indicate the arrival Shan-Thai people in the plains of Central Myanmar. Most of these assimilated and mixed with the local population; however, the frontier zones between the China, Myanmar and the emerging states in Assam or Thailand remained unruly, and non-Buddhist Shans continued to threaten the stability of post-Bagan Myanmar for times to come.[40]

Looking beyond the Mongols, the history of Bagan seems to have been mostly peaceful once the conquests of the territories in the South had been accomplished in the mid-eleventh century.[41] The only wars on record thereafter and until the invasion of the Mongols were a Sinhalese raid of Lower Myanmar in the 1160s and a battle at Tagaung in Upper Myanmar in the early thirteenth century, for which the victorious Burmese general received a reward. Both wars were seemingly small in scale and short in duration and did not put any pressure on the kingdom's material or political resources.[42] In this respect, Angkor was different from Bagan, as its kings not only tried to increase the territory of the Khmer kingdom, which resulted in the conquest of areas in central Thailand and the Malayan peninsula,[43] they were also embroiled in wars with the neighbouring Cham rulers

[39] Frasch (1996): 345-347.

[40] Luce (1958).

[41] The main events in this respect were king Anawrahta's annexation of Pegu and Thaton in Lower Myanmar, see Luce and U Pe Maung Tin (1923): 77-79.

[42] See Frasch (1996): 105-106, 187. The clash with the Sinhalese had wider repercussions in the historiography of Bagan, which are of no concern here. The Tagaung war may have either been a campaign against the hill people of Upper Myanmar or a war with the neighbouring areas of Manipur and Tripura.

[43] Chandler (2007): 69-70.

of Vietnam throughout the twelfth century. This conflict culminated in a Cham attack on Angkor in 1177/8 CE and a Khmer counterstrike few years later. Warfare between the two parties did not end until around 1216-18 CE, the time close to the end of Jayavarman VII's reign.[44]

Despite the temporary setback Angkor suffered in the late 1170s, the wars with the Cham did not end in a defeat big enough to cause (or at least contribute substantially to) the decline of the kingdom. On the other hand, it is also hard to assess the impact the wars had upon the economy of the kingdom. Wars in pre-modern Asia always served to make prisoners and hence increase the labour force a victorious ruler could command. There are indeed clear references in Jayavarman VII's inscriptions mentioned above to an ethnically composite population, comprising Cham, Mon, Burmese and perhaps even Javanese people. But whether an extra 10.000 prisoners of war added to the labour force of a megacity such as Angkor really did make a difference is rather doubtful. Nor did the wars seemingly put a strain on the social and economic resources of the kingdom is amply attested by the fact that the two major monuments of the city, Angkor Wat and the Bayon, were both built during the twelfth century, when warfare between the two sides was most intensive. Summing up this evidence, it seems clear that warfare as such nor a defeat in a particular war cannot be held responsible for the decline of Angkor, even though the economic balance sheet of the constant wars waged by the kings of Angkor is difficult to establish. The economy of the much less belligerent Bagan kingdom may not have been affected by wars at all, but when the kingdom was eventually attacked and defeated by the Mongols at the end of the thirteenth century, a single war led to the end of the kingdom and the desertion of the city.

6 Environmental Causes

Finally, the role of changes in the natural environment for the decline of empires will have to be addressed. Excluding contagious diseases and especially the thirteenth century plague, which does not seem to have affected Southeast Asia,[45] three phenomena are to be considered here: Firstly, the climatic changes brought an end to the Medieval Warm Period (MWP) between c. 900 and 1250/1300 CE and paved the way for a "little ice age" that lasted until c. 1470.[46] Secondly, the oscillation of wind systems and oceanic currents across the Pacific Ocean, known as El Nino/Southern Oscillation (ENSO), which affect Southeast Asia directly as they create the Monsoon winds and rainfall for the region. And thirdly, massive volcanic eruptions, which may cause short- and mid-term weather anomalies when large amounts of ashes, dust particles and acidic compounds reach the

[44] Chandler (2007): 66-71; Maspero (1908): 153-169.

[45] Frasch (2011).

[46] See Lieberman (2003): 102-103.

earth's atmosphere to form a veil around the globe.[47] In the most serious scenario, this dust veil may obstruct the rays of the sun and create a "volcanic winter" or "year without summer". Moreover, such mega-eruptions may also cause lasting weather anomalies including extremely volatile temperatures and excessive or failing rainfall. Recent research in tree rings and arctic ice cores has shown that a major volcanic outbreak must have occurred around 1256/57 CE, which meanwhile could be assigned to Mt. Rinjani on the Indonesian island of Lombok.[48]

The recognition of the potentially disastrous effects of volcanic eruptions has added an important aspect to the research on how environmental changes affected the development of states and empires.[49] Research in this respect has so far been limited to environmental changes more generally, which have been all too obvious in the case of Angkor, whose massive hydraulic system – it covered some one thousand square kilometres around the capital alone[50] – became severely disrupted during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[51] But whereas the decline of Angkor's irrigation works was fairly easy to recognize, scholars found it much harder to determine the factors responsible for it, with two explanations becoming the most common ones. Both referring to long-term developments, the first one highlights the ENSO phenomenon whereas the other takes into account the changes of global temperatures, which are caused by the slightly elliptic orbit of the earth and are responsible for the periods known as 'little ice ages' and the like.[52] Nor are we entirely sure how one-off natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions or earthquakes relate to these long-term phenomena just described. Observations made on such events, and conclusions drawn therefrom, suggest that large-scale eruptions did indeed bear immediate effects, ranging from economic crises (drought, famine) to political upheavals (as described above). But the analysis still remains rather vague concerning the temporal and geographical scope of the consequences: how long the disruptions last, how widely were they felt, and what intensity did they possess? What will be said below on the possible connection between a volcanic mega-eruption and the decline of empires in Southeast Asia therefore needs to be read with due caution.

As mentioned, it is now clear that the decline of Angkor in the late thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries was accompanied by severe damage to its irrigation system, with creeks and canal changing their course or running dry, muddy sedimentation at the bottom of the major storage reservoirs (*baray*) as well as repeated repairs to their embankments and

[47] Fletcher (2000).

[48] The seminal paper in this field is Atwell (2001); For a brief summary and additional Asian references for the 1256/7 eruption, see Frasch (2018): 77-80.

[49] For general survey of the climate in pre-modern Southeast Asian history, see Liebermann and Buckley (2012).

[50] Buckley et al. (2010).

[51] Buckley et al. (2010).

[52] Lieberman (2003): 101-112; Buckley et al. (2014).

spillways.[53] Apparently, the city and its hydraulic system were hit by massive variations of rainfall, alternating between periods of extreme wetness and decades of drought, in which the years between c. 1340 and 1370 are standing out for bringing a first mega-drought.[54] The occurrence of this drought and its underlying climatic variations have been attributed to the ENSO phenomenon, but knowing of the outbreak of Mt. Rinjani we can now ask for a possible connection between these two events. However, the evidence from Angkor that would allow us to identify any kind of volcanic fall-out is virtually non-existent. To begin with, and as already noted, the writing of inscriptions virtually stopped after the reign of Jayavarman VII and was not resumed until the early fourteenth century. Secondly, agricultural production apparently did not suffer greatly during the thirteenth century, which is indicated by Zhou Daguan's description from the 1290s and the rainfall data for this century.[55] Finally, analysis of the soil at Angkor has so far not yielded any evidence of ashes and other deposits of volcanic origin or higher levels of acidity. Despite the geographical proximity of Angkor to the epicentre of the eruption – some 2700 kilometers as the crow (or the ash cloud) flies – the time span between the event and the ecological presents a considerable gap, one that is perhaps better explained by long-term climatic changes than by a singular event.[56] As long as a clear connection between the volcanic eruption and the decline of Angkor cannot be identified, it would seem preferable to speak of an "erosion of power" in a more metaphorical than literal sense to describe the political and the agricultural decline of Angkor beginning in the second half of the thirteenth century.

Bagan appears to represent a case broadly similar to that of Angkor. The kingdom flourished throughout the thirteenth century, and its initially successful resistance to the Mongol invaders in the 1280s indicates that the kingdom's political, military and economic strength was largely undiminished. In turn, this means that the 1256/7 eruption did not affect the political or economic stability of the kingdom in more than a peripheral manner. That something may have been wrong the can be inferred from the epigraphic records that were written – or rather: not written – at the time, as only five inscriptions are known from the years 1256 to 1258. This is a surprisingly small number given that in average some nine to ten inscriptions would have been recorded every year for the rest of the thirteenth century. As inscriptions are usually written to record a donation to a temple or monastery,

[53] Fletcher et al. (2008).

[54] Buckley et al. (2010): 6.

[55] Zhou Daguan (2007): 86.

[56] Note, however, that the dating of the decline of Angkor's irrigation system has so far depended on the data for rainfall and temperature changes discussed above. Taking the date of the eruption of Mt. Rinjani into consideration, too, could in fact lead to a re-assessment of the data and perhaps bring the beginning of the decline forward by half a century. In fact, Fletcher et al. (2017) have made exactly this point, highlighting that Angkor's irrigation system proved resilient enough to ride out short-term weather irregularities but faltered under the pressure of decade-long wet or dry years.

this lack of records also indicates a certain pause in new constructions for those years.[57] Again, there is caveat to this interpretation as the year 1256 saw the sudden death of king Uccana, which in the person of Narasihapati, the son of a concubine, eventually brought an outsider to the throne. There may have been a struggle for succession with all the social and political disruptions this could bring, though the available evidence suggests the succession to have gone smoothly.[58]

As with Angkor, the agrarian economy of Bagan may have been resilient enough to ride out the short-term effects of a volcanic eruption. Spread out across the dry zone of central Burma, its irrigation system was based on a mix of perennial rivers, reservoirs and wells. The rivers drew their waters from the eastern ranges of the Himalayas, the reservoirs collected rainwater, and the ground water resources complemented both sources or took their place where they did not exist. Crops varied accordingly. In the river plains and around the larger tanks, the cultivation of wet rice (*padi*) prevailed, with the system often allowing for a second harvest of either 'winter rice' or vegetables. Dry crops such as pulses, groundnuts or sesame would be grown in less well irrigated areas. In years of poor rainfall, the rivers and wells still allowed the cultivation of dry crops and rice, the latter on a limited scale. This, together with the storage of rice in public granaries,[59] made the agrarian structure resilient against the vicissitudes of nature and helped to prevent famines in years in years of want. It may have been more resilient than the irrigation based agrarian economy of Angkor, as the latter was not only much bigger in scale, but also heavily concentrated on the capital area.

But how long did the irrigation system of Bagan and its successor states in the fourteenth century survive? Unfortunately, there is little evidence at all to answer this question as the study of irrigation in pre-colonial Myanmar has been widely neglected, and where it exists, has assumed a continuity of irrigation works from the Bagan kingdom (or even before) to the British colonial period, when the first surveys were produced.[60] This assumption of a long-term static continuity has of coursed prevented to take notice of temporal variations, which may have resulted from climatic and other changes. That the end of the Bagan kingdom was not accompanied by an agrarian recession can be seen from the numerous donations of land and serfs made to Buddhist monasteries at Bagan and elsewhere during the first half of the fourteenth century. Their style or content does not dramatically differ from those made during the Bagan period.[61] On the other hand, the eventual transfer of the

[57] See Frasch (2018).

[58] Frasch (1996): 137-139. Curiously, Uccana was known as "the king who died at Tala" (Tala-pyam-min) as he was staying at Tala, an outpost in the Irawadi delta south of Yangon, when he passed away. The epithet indicates that the king's death was an exceptional occurrence, and it is of course tempting to speculate that it was caused by the volcanic eruption or even by a tsunami.

[59] Frasch (1996): 166.

[60] See Stuart (1913); and for a broader analysis, Aung-Thwin (1990).

[61] A comprehensive study of this transitional period from late Bagan to the early decades of the Ava kingdom with attention to political, economic and religious developments is still lacking.

capital from Bagan to Ava (in 1364) came towards the end of what we now know to have been a mega-drought. The new capital was established at the downstream end of the Kyaukse area, the agricultural hub of Upper Myanmar formed by a river-based irrigation system. If the environmental crisis of those decades was indeed felt in Myanmar as well, the scope of the Kyaukse system may helped in its mitigation, and the transfer of the capital close to this economic heartland would have made perfect sense. However, this logic of the founding of a new capital in Myanmar remains to be demonstrated.

7 Conclusion

It should be clear that the five aspects discussed above do not represent all the reasons that can be held responsible for the fall of an empire, nor are they to be seen separately from each other. This conclusion will therefore, after briefly summarising the main findings for each point, identify possible causalities and interdependences between them.

So what caused the decline of imperial kingdoms on the Southeast Asian mainland? There are, firstly, no signs of a dynastic decline in either Bagan or Angkor and as far as the data available allows to see. What may count here is the cowardice of the last ruler of Bagan, who fled his capital instead of defending it against the Mongol intruders, thereby violating the royal code of conduct. Though members of his family succeeded him for a couple of years, the royal family of Bagan was eventually replaced by upstart rulers, who also deserted the capital city of Bagan. It should be noted that this dynastic decline was the consequence of an external challenge and may not have happened without the military defeat to the Mongols.

Religious change did play a role in the case of Angkor, though its real dimension is hard to assess. Jayavarman's VII turn to Buddhism was no fundamental deviation from the previous royal cult, even though it seems to have caused a 'Hinduist backlash' under his successors. Nor did it alienate the ruler from the population – in fact, Buddhism may have found quite a few followers among the Khmer people before Jayavarman's conversion, bringing the king closer to his people.

As both kingdoms abandoned the path of expansionism after an initial enlargement and rounding up of the core area, the problem of over-expansion does not really apply. Seen on the whole, the kings of Angkor were more belligerent than their neighbours from Bagan, but did not attempts to make conquests for the sake of it. The wars with the Cham, which marked the twelfth century, were partly defensive and did not lead to the annexation of further territories (but they appear to have resulted in an increase of population by way of prisoners of war). The over-exploitation of resources, in contrast, seems to have played a bigger role. The construction of religious monuments was exceptional both in regard of size and speed; in intensified during the final century of both kingdoms and may have put some pressure on the human resources required to build them as well as the state economy. This latter point has been highlighted for Bagan, albeit in a flawed manner, which will have to be reassessed. Jayavarman's endowment of his temples and other institutions with

human and material resources was indeed extraordinary, but then again the size of the population of Angkor may have allowed him to allocate the numbers recorded in the inscriptions. For this problem, no concluding analysis can be given yet.

The military raids and conquests of the Mongols affected kingdoms all over Eurasia including Southeast Asia, but perhaps only China more than Bagan. After their victory over the Bagan army the Mongols temporarily occupied the capital but soon replaced their direct rule with an indirect one. Still, their advance into Myanmar had lasting effects, damaging the imperial kingship (by compelling the king to flee) and possibly the status of Bagan as a sacred centre as well, and in addition they seem to have unsettled people and triggered migratory movements among the Shan-Thai people. Certainly, the military economy of a state – structure of the army, weaponry and capacity for recruitment down to military tactics plus the eventual spoils from war (territory or manpower) – is a factor to be taken into account for the decline of states. This broader view indicates that the immediate outcomes of a battle or a war alone may be less decisive than long-term or collateral consequences. The Mongol expansions into Southeast Asia (and notably Bagan) weakened political structures and caused demographic disruptions that were both felt long after they had retreated from their conquests.

Moving from the military economy to the general economy, both states offer points to discuss the question of economy exhaustion and over-exploitation of resources through their impressive religious construction programmes and subsequent allocation of economic resources to them. In both kingdoms, the economic foundations appear to be strong: The cultivation of wet-rice based on an irrigation system that was extensive, sophisticated and excellently adapted to the geophysical and climatic conditions could sustain a large population – around one million in the case of Angkor city alone – and hence create a rather stable political structure. It may have even provided for a low population growth, which together with a limited number of immigrants, may have made one usual cause for war in early states, the taking of prisoners of war, obsolete. Still, the size and number of the monuments completed during the heyday of the two kingdoms is truly stunning, and so is the amount of land and labour transferred to them. Even if it is accepted that this wealth did not become a permanent property of the individual institutions, their temporary ownership will have had a short-term impact upon the economy of each kingdom. It seems to require further research into this to establish the scope of this impact and its duration.

However, it seems clear even now that this pressure on the economic foundations of the two kingdoms will have been amplified by the demands and consequences of warfare on the one hand and by natural disasters on the other. Although it is currently impossible to fully assess the short-term or long-term consequences of the volcanic eruption of 1256/7, the enormous climatic fluctuations which occurred during the first half of the fourteenth century dealt a heavy blow on the already highly stressed agrarian bases of these states. Neither of them would recover from this crisis.

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Part IV

The Americas

The Decline and Fall of the Inca Empire

Doris Kurella

The Tawantinsuyu, the "realm of the four parts", was the largest indigenous empire of the Americas, having reached its maximum extension shortly before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in 1532 A.D.[1] The end of the empire has been perceived as having been abrupt, ending with the death of the last independent Inca emperor, Atahuallpa, garroted by Francisco Pizarro in 1533 A.D. Following this narrative, the question arises how the Inca empire could have been defeated by only Pizarro with his accompanying 168 soldiers within a very short time span.[2] This history has been written by the Spanish side only, and implies that Spanish superiority made it possible to defeat millions with very few.[3] Within the last decades, this erroneous assumption has been rectified and the fall of the empire has been pushed forward in time to 1572 A.D. This date marks the capture and execution of Tupac Amaru I, the last descendent of the Inca royal line who claimed the title *Sapa Inca*, the highest, divine Inca.[4] With his death all that had been the Inca empire finally passed completely from indigenous to Spanish hands.[5] Recent archaeological as well as

[1] Bauer (1992), Bauer and Alan Covey (2004), Pärssinen (1992), Shimada (2015), Alconini and Alan Covey (2018a, b), Alconini (2018).

[2] Kagan (2009).

[3] Lamana (2008):6.

[4] Bauer et al. (2016).

[5] For a good insight into recording Inca history and the view of the Spanish conquistadores see Alconini and Alan Covey (2018a, b): 691–697.

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ethnohistorical research, especially pertaining to Vilcabamba, the last refuge of the Inca emperors and the center of resistance against the Spanish during the conquest,[6] gives new insights into the process of the surrender of the Inca empire and the systematic and continuous takeover of the royal Inca lands—the economic basis of Inca royalty.

With this new perception of the conquest having been much more difficult and having taken much more time—almost 40 years, some questions still remain to be answered: Did the internal structure of the Inca empire contribute to a decline before the arrival of the Spaniards and thus make it more vulnerable to an intrusion from outside? Or, did imperial overstretch[7]- the Inca empire had grown to a north-south extent of about 5000 km within a time span of about 100 years, lead to a loss of control over some of the conquered provinces? In addition, the forced relocation of a considerable part of the population during the empire's last decades had led to rebellion and unrest, which partially resulted in alliances of relocated communities with the arriving Spaniards. Or was the demise of the Incas just a "coincidence"? Did the Spaniards arrive at a critical point for the Inca, who had just ended a brutal war of succession which had shattered and destroyed a considerable part of their empire.

Most publications on the conquest of the Inca empire focus on the battles between the conquistadors and the Inca army, but are less focused on the process of the decline and fall of the empire.[8] Or sources provide long and detailed accounts of events as the capture of Atahuallpa in Cajamarca, but no analysis.[9]To make the process of the decline and fall of the Inca empire more clearly visible, this paper is structured into eight sections that reflect the consecutive steps of the downfall. The first section is a short description of the basic structure of the Inca empire; this is followed by an outline of the war of succession and the arrival of the conquistadors, with the ensuing kidnapping and assassination of Atahuallpa. The conquest following his death will be divided into two parts: the guerilla warfare imposed by some of the former generals of Atahuallpa on the Spaniards and their allies on one side, and the siege of Cusco as well as the subsequent withdrawal of the Inca elite to Vilcabamba in 1539 on the other side. The final strike to the Inca empire was given by the Viceroy Francisco de Toledo in imposing reforms that caused profound changes among the indigenous population. He was also successful in capturing the last *Sapa Inca* Tupac Amaru I in Vilcabamba and executed him in 1572 A.D., an event which marks the end of indigenous power in the Central Andes.

[6] Bauer (2016).

[7] Kennedy (1987).

[8] Koch (2001); Lamana (2008):3.

[9] Hemming (1993).

1 The Basic Structure of the Inca Empire

The Inca are still perceived as having brought Andean civilization to perfection. A rich, well organized economic system, based on reciprocity and redistribution, a perfect infrastructure and highly specialized as well as efficient workshops distributed over the country, in combination with an impressive architecture, are characteristics that are granted to the Inca empire up to the present.[10] Tax had to be paid in labor, the so-called *m'ita* system. The very core of the empire, the axis around which it spun, were agriculture and the control of nature.[11] The Andes are a rugged mountain chain with an extremely diverse ecology but suffer from a restricted water supply. The southern part of the Andes form the driest desert in the world, the puna de Atacama. In the north, in what is now Ecuador and Colombia, they become more humid. Nevertheless, the Central Andes are a region deeply marked by water deficiency. Another problem is that only a small percentage of the area is suitable for agriculture. Thus, the Inca, combining, refining and developing the achievements of numerous predecessors, managed to significantly increase the amount of cultivable land by terracing a considerable part of the mountains and guaranteeing constant water supply by building long distance canals, wells and cisterns. To further increase the productivity of the area they moved part of the population to places where more human input was needed. Through forced relocations, they created a network of supra-regional production sites. The infrastructure, consisting of an extensive road system and storage facilities evenly distributed all over the empire, guaranteed a sufficient supply for everybody. Despite this enormous economic success and the extension of a "pax Incaica" to a region that was ridden by war and competition before the establishment of the Inca empire, they made many enemies in taking people away from their territories and relocating them thousands of kilometers away.

Some scholars propose that the Inca empire should be seen as a network of asymmetrical relationships that had to be ritually confirmed and newly established once a ruler died. Constant renegotiation with the provinces made the Inca empire flexible, but also vulnerable.[12]

The Inca empire was a sacred state with a ruling elite, all born noble and claiming themselves to be the sons of the sun. They were organized in clans, the *panacas,* with estates in and around the Inca capital Cusco, Machu Picchu being one of them. The reigning Inca, *Sapa Inca*, chose his successor from among the members of his own *panaca*, so that there was no fixed rule of succession.

[10] Kurella (2019).

[11] Lamana (2008):109.

[12] Golte (2013); Pease and Franklin (1992).

2 The War of Succession

The sheer size of the Inca empire had probably provoked the last *Sapa Inca* before the arrival of the Spaniards, Huayna Capac, to divide the empire into a northern section with Tomebamba, now Cuenca, Ecuador, as its capital, and a southern section with Cusco as its capital. Huayna Capac died of smallpox before he could name his successor or successors and thus left the empire without a declared *Sapa Inca*. It is unclear how the naming of two successors came about, one in Cusco, Huascar, and one in Tomebamba, Atahuallpa.

Atahuallpa was in control of the largest part of the Inca army, because the ongoing expansion under his father, Huayna Capac, had taken place in fighting the Pasto in what is now southern Colombia. Cusco-born Huascar had the sympathy of most of the country, whereas Tomebamba-born Atahuallpa was seen as a foreigner throughout most of the Inca realm. It only took a short time until the rivalry between the brothers flared into open conflict. Huascar tried to get the northern part of the empire under his control and Atahuallpa became infamous for his campaigns of vengeance against subjects whom he considered to be disloyal, among them the Cañari, who later became one of the most faithful allies of the Spaniards. This alliance played an important role in the fall of the empire. Quizquiz, one of the famous generals of Atahuallpa's army, conquered Cusco, killed Huascar's family members in Huascar's presence and burned some of the mummy bundles of former Inca kings, especially those of Huascar's ancestors. This was done to make sure that there would never be any future claim to power from this side. This demonstrates how little respect the Inca themselves showed for the rules and religious traditions they had set up when it touched their access to power. The assassination of Huascar's family turned out to be a traumatic event for the Inca nobility in Cusco. Huascar himself was later killed upon the order of Atahuallpa. This war of succession lasted several years and tore the empire apart. Trade routes were destroyed, villages burnt down, allies of the other side killed. Atahuallpa, winner of the conflict, assembled his army and his generals to return to Tomebamba and to face the handful of foreigners who had arrived in the meantime.

3 The Conquistadors

A considerable number of the conquistadors came from the region of Extremadura. Trujillo, the birthplace of the Pizarro brothers, alone could claim 56 of them, Mérida and Medellín, the later the birthplace of Hernán Cortés were also important. Many conquistadors were related to each other and belonged to the Spanish noble class of the hidalgos.[13] Due to the reconquista, during which Spain was reclaimed by Christian forces from its Islamic conquerors, Estremadura was one of the most contested regions for many decades.

[13] Spalding (1999): 916; Restall and Fernández-Armesto (2012).

The conquerors coming from this region were experienced fighters and had grown up with war. They were mostly impoverished. The conquest of the Americas was seen as a chance to become rich quickly. The conquistadors were organized in small *compañías,* companies, composed of several captains, each one following his own interest.[14] To gain wealth was the most important aspect. A fact that enhanced this intent was that they had to indebt themselves to pay for the transit to South America.[15] The people to be conquered were facing a ruthless, greedy, war-experienced and uncompromising enemy that was unwilling to agree to any kind of coexistence. In addition to this, the Spanish conquistadores perceived themselves as being superior to the indigenous peoples and cultures they encountered.[16] The higher-ranked conquistadores as the Pizarro brothers Francisco, Hernando, Gonzalo, and Juan had different intentions. They were seeking to "establish new realms, new political entities under their ultimate supervision and command",[17] an intention that lead finally to the civil war among the conquistadors in sixteenth century Peru. Another important ideological fact was that they followed an overall concept of a "geographically, politically and religiously cohesive Christianity"[18] that was the implicit goal of the Spanish crown.

4 The Death of Atahuallpa

Francisco Pizarro, a cousin of Hernán Cortés who, 12 years earlier, had successfully conquered the Aztec empire, had learned of Cortés' mistakes, experiences as well as ultimate success and thoroughly applied all this in his conquest of the Inca empire. He arranged a meeting with Atahuallpa, immediately kidnapped him and posed an infamous ransom demand of gold and silver. He kept Atahuallpa hostage for a whole year and used the friendship he developed with him to learn as much about the structure of the Inca empire as he could. During this time, Atahuallpa went on operating as ruler, dictating laws and giving orders. While keeping Atahuallpa hostage, the entries of the Spaniards into the interior of the Inca empire were reduced to plundering temples and grabbing as much gold as possible. Only after the assassination of Atahuallpa—which was not well received by the Spanish court—the real conquest of the empire began in 1533, 1 year after the landing of Pizarro on the north coast of Peru.

[14] Lamana (2008): 30.

[15] Spalding (1999): 914.

[16] Wernke (2018): 702; Goose (2008).

[17] Spalding (1999): 920.

[18] Bernecker (2014): 21.

5 The First Part of the Conquest

After the assassination of Atahuallpa in 1533 the conquistadors installed puppet rulers as *Sapa Inca*, and also started to invade Inca territories. During the next years, the conquest seemed to follow unwritten rules: the installed puppet *Sapa Incas* first cooperated with the Spaniards and, after a while turned against them, joining the guerilla armies of Atahuallpa's former generals Quizquiz and Rumiñavi, or started to maintain their own small armies. Being technically inferior, which meant fighting arquebuses, cannons, and skilled riders with excellent swords, the indigenous armies tried to use their much better knowledge of the territory in setting traps like cut rope bridges, but very often were sold to the Spaniards by the local population. During the Incas' last years and their maximum expansion the imposed taxes, being paid in fine quality textiles or other supplies for the elite, must have been extremely high.

A second important aspect was that the Spaniards, after having killed the winning party of the war of succession, namely Atahuallpa, successfully convinced the Huascar faction to unite with them. The price for the support by the Spaniards was subjection under their rule. When Pizarro finally arrived in Cusco, he installed a "puppet Inca" who died few months after his coronation.[19] The next in line was Manco Capac, also called Manco Inca, a son of Huascar, who had been fleeing the troops of Quizquiz for years, being in fear of being killed by Atahuallpa's former general. The Spanish troops were welcomed as liberators, not only by Manco Inca, but also by many local tribes surrounding the Cusco valley. The Cusco branch of the Inca nobility, after a couple of years when strategic marriages had taken place, had become closely related to the conquistadors and Manco Inca supported the Spanish troops in their fight against Quizquiz and his soldiers. In the following years Pizarro and his generals, who already had subdued what is now Peru, fought to conquer the northern part of the Inca empire, what is now Ecuador, that was still under control of Quizquiz and Rumiñavi. They succeeded 2 years later, in 1535, and Rumiñavi was executed in Quito. Quizquiz had been killed by his own soldiers who wanted to surrender to the Spaniards.

6 The Second Part of the Conquest

The Spanish troops were fighting in what is now Ecuador, when Pizarro founded then called *Ciudad de los Reyes*, Lima, on the central coast of Peru in 1535. At the same time Manco Capac tried to re-establish himself as *Sapa Inca* in Cusco. After having supported Pizarro and his troops in the beginning, "he was soon disillusioned".[20] The more powerful he became and the more he was able to reestablish the religion and obedience of the

[19] Lee (2018): 745.

[20] Lee (2018): 745.

population, the more suspicious and violent the Spaniards in Cusco became. Especially by taking many women, among them Manco's wife, away from their husbands and families, the conquistadors lost sympathy among the population. After having been captured and tortured by the Spaniards, led by Francisco Pizarro's brother Hernando, in 1535, Manco Inca finally launched a revolt and tried to drive them out of Cusco. On Easter 1536 what is called now "The Great Rebellion" started. Manco Inca and his generals had been able—despite the country being under Spanish control—to gather between 100,000 and 200,000 indigenous soldiers around Cusco.[21] This number is an average of numbers given and broadly accepted by chroniclers as well as modern historians. The "asymmetries between parties"—the Spanish side consisted of only about 100–200 soldiers - was remarkable.[22] With these armies on both sides, the 5 month siege of Cusco began. The revolt did not stop there, but started to spread all over Peru, which was probably the reason why it failed. Despite being very successful in the beginning—Francisco Pizarro was so frightened that he reached out for help as far as Guatemala and Nicaragua—the failed siege of Lima and the following loss of the leading generals of the uprising was the beginning of the end. Finally, in 1537, the Spaniards had recalled sufficient troops and leaders back from their conquering expeditions to reunite forces, end the siege of Cusco and reconquer the rest of the country. Manco Inca was forced to flee and left Cusco, travelling down the Urubamba river and finally deciding to stay and settle in a steep valley of a confluence of the Urubamba in the small Inca settlement of Vilcabamba. Once Manco Inca had left, his brother Paullu Inca took over and helped the Spaniards to defeat the rest of Manco Inca's troops. This again shows the lack of loyalty within the Inca royal class.[23] Paullu Inca is now being seen in Peruvian history as a person who sold out the Inca empire due to personal greed and his interest in staying rich and comfortable within the rising colonial nobility. To many historians the lost war on Cusco and the retreat of Manco Inca to Vilcabamba already marked the end of the Inca empire.[24] In this article, the definite end is postponed to the fall of Vilcabamba according to Lamana's thesis that "Inca order did not cease or simply get exiled after Manco's retreat, but reinvented itself", proposing that Paullu Inca's new politics were a shift from indigenous to *mestizo* politics.[25]

[21] Hemming (1970): 190.
[22] Lamana (2008): 127.
[23] Amino (2015): 351.
[24] Lamana (2008): 159.
[25] Lamana (2008): 160.

7 The Inca Refuge and Relict State of Vilcabamba

Vilcabamba was an old Inca town located in the same area as Machu Picchu, Choquequirao and Vitcos.[26] From there, Manco Inca tried to regain control of the Inca realm and did lead an organized resistance to Spanish rule which lasted 33 years.[27] The three sons of Manco Inca, Sayri Tupac, Titu Cusi Yupanqui and Tupac Amaru later came to play a significant role in this resistance.

At this point, the Spanish policies did start to strongly influence the conquest of Peru. In 1542 emperor Charles V. released the *Leyes Nuevas*, which were intended to protect the indigenous population from slavery and were strongly resisted by the conquistadors. This led to various uprisings against the Spanish crown, especially within the respective viceroyalties in Mexico, Honduras and above all, in Peru. In addition to this, various factions among the conquistadores were fighting over who would gain control over Peru. In particular Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro got into violent fights over years. After the death of Francisco Pizarro in 1541, who had been killed by loyal Almagro supporters, and Francisco's brother Gonzalo Pizarro's constant uprising against the Spanish crown that resulted in the assassination of viceroy Blasco Nuñez Vela, Charles V had sent Pedro de la Gasca in 1547, to end Pizarro's revolt, which he did successfully. Before, Manco Inca continuously attacked the Spanish troops from his retreat in Vilcabamba and was himself steadily attacked by the troops of Gonzalo Pizarro. This is important, because Manco Inca had granted refuge to several Spanish soldiers who belonged to the losing party of the Spanish uprising in 1544 or 1545.[28] Unaware of whom he had granted access to one of his towns, Vitcos, Manco Inca was stabbed to death by them shortly after in presence of his son Titu Cusi Yupanqui who left one of the very few indigenous reports on what had happened.[29] The death of Manco Inca was a significant blow to the organized resistance.

His three sons had already grown up under Spanish rule, and did not have such a hostile attitude towards their new lords. They began, what is being called *mestizo* politics. Sayri Tupac, the new *Sapa Inca*, had been convinced by the Spaniards to leave protected Vilcabamba and settle in the largest and richest former royal estate, Yucay, in the Sacred Valley of the Incas, namely the Urubamba Valley. The Yucay estate, which formerly belonged to Huayna Capac, included large tracts of terraced fields and was run by about 2000 relocated people from all-over the Inca empire. The owner of Yucay was granted a luxurious lifestyle. To get the estate of Yucay, Sayri Tupac had to agree to be baptized, and the Vilcabamba region was to be missionized. Sayri Tupac died very young soon after and

[26] Lee (2018); According to Vincent R. Lee, the area surrounding Vilcabamba was the only place in the region that was suitable for large-scale agriculture (Lee 2018:742).

[27] Lee (2018): 748.

[28] The exact year of this uprising is not known.

[29] Julien (2006):138–139; Titu Cusi Yupanqui [1570] (2005).

left only one offspring, Beatriz Clara Coya. She being a small child, a citizen of Cusco, Atilano de Anaya, was placed in charge of her holdings.

Rule over the still extant Vilcabamba kingdom passed to Titu Cusi Yupanqui, who had spent a part of his childhood in the care of a Spanish family in Cusco. Under his rule, relations were friendly and the Spanish part of Peru even kept diplomatic ties to Vilcabamba. A series of meetings between Spanish negotiators and Titu Cusi Yupanqui led to the treaty of Acobamba in 1566. In this treaty, the Inca conceded to Spanish rule and accepted a Spanish overseer, a so-called *corregidor* for the Vilcabamba region. The treaty also specified that Titu was to become a Christian, was granted amnesty by the crown and that his son, Quispe Titu, could marry Beatriz Clara Coya to gain control over the estate of Yucay. In response to this, priests were finally granted access to the Vilcabamba region. After a struggle between priests and Titu over the construction of churches and burning down the Inca shrine of Yurak Rumi, Titu suddenly died and rumours were spread that he had been poisoned by the Spaniards.

8 The Fall of Vilcabamba

The last of Manco Inca's sons, Tupac Amaru I stopped the negotiations with the Spaniards. Three years later, in 1569, Francisco de Toledo became viceroy of Peru.[30] He had been sent to finally end the ongoing war among the Spanish conquistadors and wipe out the last resistance of the Inca against the Spaniards.[31] To firmly establish Spanish rule over the former Inca empire, he promised to set "fire and fury" on the Inca to finally end their resistance and their rule. Under his administration the Spanish empire undertook a forced relocation of the indigenous population of the former Inca empire that profoundly changed the situation in the Andes: More than a million peasants were forced to relocate into new towns, called *reducciones*, with a uniform, quadrilateral street grid surrounding a central plaza and church, governed by indigenous men holding Spanish municipal offices and titles. This largest forced relocation ever undertaken within the Spanish empire has been called the *Reducción General de Indios*.[32]

In June 1572 several hundred Spaniards accompanied by strong Andean allies, among them the Cañari and the Chachapoya, both fierce enemies of the Inca, invaded Vilcabamba. After a short time they were able to capture Tupac Amaru I who was taken to Cusco and beheaded after a short trial on the 24th of September 1572. At the same time, Toledo signed a decree, allowing the caretaker of Beatriz Clara Coya, García Oñaz de Loyola, to marry her, the last of the pure Inca bloodline. This marriage gave the Spaniards access to the estate of Yucay, and marks the end of independent indigenous rule in the Central Andes.

[30] Mumford (2012): 85.

[31] Amino (2015): 350.

[32] Cook und Málaga (1975), Rivas and León (1994), Covey (2020).

9 Conclusions

Summing up, the fall of the Inca empire had more than one cause. It had certainly been facilitated by the Inca civil war that had left the empire in a very vulnerable condition. Second, the conquest is not being seen anymore as Spaniards vs. Incas, but as Spaniards and their strong indigenous allies vs. Inca with attached loyal indigenous groups. The internal structure of the Inca empire with forced relocations and unstable, permanently renegotiable relationships with allies and subjugated chiefs, also contributed to its downfall. The role of the diseases that have caused a demographic collapse[33] cannot be underestimated. Several waves of influenza as well as smallpox had left a considerable part of the indigenous population dead or seriously weakened.

In general it is very problematic to draw a coherent conclusion on the downfall of the Inca empire. Since we do not have written sources from the Inca empire itself before the conquest, there is no detailed information of the Inca empire. We have profound insights into the economy, we know about some relationships between the Inca and conquered or subjugated provinces, but by far not of all of them. Until now, we do not entirely understand how the Inca empire worked and what kept it together. Thus, it is difficult to say, what tore it apart.

One of the most important researchers on Inca culture, John H. Rowe, proposed the most important factor in the downfall in his opinion: "The establishment of Spanish dominion in Peru was, then, a consequence of the Inca civil war. What made it possible was the desperate need of Huascar's party, defeated in the civil war and persecuted by a victorious Atahuallpa. Spanish dominion was established, not by military victories, but by an alliance with the faction that had lost the civil war, an alliance cemented by the two political killings, those of Atahualpa and Cahallcu Chima, his son, that destroyed the leadership of the party that had won. The Spaniards demanded and got submission to the Spanish crown as the price of the alliance with Huascar's family."[34] And, again citing John Rowe: "There is little glory for anyone in this story."[35]

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[33] Cook (1981), (1998), Murphy (2018).

[34] Rowe (1946).

[35] Rowe (1957).

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The Downfall of Aztec Rule, 1519–1521

Felix Hinz

1 The State of the Mexica

The rule of the Mexica, the so-called Aztecs, was not actually an empire, but an alliance between the three cities of Tenochtitlán, Texcoco and Tlacopán, located in central Mexico, with the aim of joining forces to subjugate as many neighbouring states (*altépetl*) as possible and force them to pay tributes.[1] Tenochtitlán was by far the largest of these cities and must be regarded in a narrower sense as a state of the Aztecs or Mexica. Estimates of the urban population vary between 100,000 and 300,000 inhabitants. López de Gómara speculates: "When Cortés moved in, México was a city of 60,000 houses."[2] In any case, it was one of the largest cities in the world at that time.[3]

[1] For this in detail: Carrasco (2011).

[2] López de Gómara [1540] (1943): cap. LXXVIII, vol. 1, 231. Where he got this information from is unclear. In general, this source raises a lot of questions about who Gómara was and whether he had known Cortés, whether he was even his house chaplain, as Las Casas dismissively claims (Las Casas [1515-1566] (1994), vol. V, 2251; cap. CXV, 2256; cap. CXXII, 2291; cap. CXXIII, 2294, cap. CXLII, 2382, etc.)—or if his name was even just a pseudonym behind which Cortés hides himself. (Duverger 2015: 71-95). See also Jiménez (2001) in general.

[3] Martínez (1992): 25.

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The warfare of the Triple Alliance consisted in terrorizing the population of the enemy and in taking as many prisoners as possible, who were ritually sacrificed at certain festivities on the temple pyramids, visible from afar. The descriptions of these bloody human sacrifices, in which the hearts of the victims were cut out alive, were with reference to Bartolomé de Las Casas repeatedly dismissed as Spanish horror stories, but 2018 the last doubts about them were refuted archaeologically. They really existed—even in the orders of magnitude described in the sources.[4] The rule of the Aztec Triple Alliance was therefore based on terror and fear. This had been the first weak point of this state.

Tenochtitlán was founded in the first half of the fourteenth century. Together with its probably older twin-town Tlatelolco, it was situated in the middle of the big lagoon of Texcoco, which has disappeared today, and was relatively easy to defend—only connected to the mainland by causeways. Although the Mexica had warrior orders (the "Tigers" and the "Eagles"),[5] they only had a non-standing peasant army, but which was experienced in war. There were no notable Aztec garrisons or even border fortresses in Mexico,[6] but the Aztec army was, so to speak, the spider in the web and was only mobilized when war was waged. This strategy had proved to be effective until the emergence of the Spaniards—and was later adopted by them in their colonial defence plans.

The structure of the Aztec state was a strictly hierarchical one. Religion and state were—as one can already see from the sacrificial cult—closely connected, i.e. the highest state leadership held at the same time the highest priesthood. At the top was the *huey tlatoani*, the "great speaker", with the *cihuacóatl* standing by his side,[7] who represented the *huey tlatoani* in his absence, among other tasks not yet clarified. The warfare at least outside the city seems to have been under the responsibility the *huey tlatoani*.

Social advancement was only possible through war fame.[8] Otherwise, an Aztec was what he or she was born to be.[9] These rigid social forms, which came close to a caste system, proved to be another weak point of the Aztec tribute empire. Only a relatively small and, on top of that, easily identifiable elite was the mainstay of the state.[10]

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[4]The conquistador Gonzalo de Umbria calculated 36,000 skulls for the Large Skull Framework (*tzompantli*) in Tenochtitlán. Miralles Ostos (2001): 163; See recent archaeological discoveries: Embury-Dennis (2018).

[5]Durán [1570] (1967), vol. 1: lib. I, cap. X, 106.

[6]Prem 42006: 22 speaks only of "small garrisons of weir farmers" in particularly hard-fought areas, whose "military effect is uncertain".

[7]Prem 42006: 23. Even Sahagún strangely hardly responds to this presumably second highest office in the state of Mexica.

[8]Berdan (2003): 40.

[9]In the lib. IV. of his *Historia general,* Sahagún meticulously explains the extent to which the date on which a Mexica was born determined its fate irrevocably. (Sahagún [ca. 1580] (2004): lib. IV., 345-434).

[10]More about the history and culture of Mexica as well as further literature: Smith (2012); and Carrasco (2012); or in German Prem (2011); and Riese (2011).

2 The Spanish Conquest

The history of the fall of the Aztec empire is known to us practically only from the point of view of the Spanish conquerors, who wrote down several accounts as eyewitness, some of them remarkable.[11] Since the Mexicans, even after their subjugation to the Spanish, were no longer allowed to write what they wanted, but were at most allowed to write texts in Latin script under the control of the Christian missionaries, they can almost be regarded as a silent group with regard to the conquest of Mexico. There is an exception in the *Annals of Tlatelolco, which were* probably written from 1528 in Latin script but in Náhuatl, the language of Mexica.[12]

The Spanish accounts, including those of the missionaries, even if they were written on Náhuatl, are in many respects not credible. There is no more or less factual Aztec war diary or something similar, so that we actually know very little about how surprising the appearance of the Spaniards in 1518 and 1519 on the Mexican Gulf Coast really was for the Mexica.[13] They also traded with the Maya, who settled on the Yucatán peninsula, among other places. It is uncertain if (and which) European ships touched the Mexican coast before 1518. On the other hand, the Spaniards had been in the Caribbean since 1492 and had brutally conquered Cuba in 1511-1515, so it is very likely that refugees from there reached Mayan areas, and conversely the seafaring Mayans had news of the Spaniards in the Caribbean that they may have passed on to the Aztec traders, the *pochteca*.

It seems certain that the leadership of the Mexica, which had an army of thousands of men, was not at all disturbed by the landing of Cortés at San Juan de Ulúa near today Veracruz on 21 April 1519. On the contrary, Cortés in Tenochtitlán seems to have been completely underestimated, and in fact a troop of initially only about 550 soldiers and sailors, 16 horses and some culverins did not seem to be terrifying. The previous expeditions of Francisco Hernández de Córdoba (1517) and Juan de Grijalba (1518) had been even much smaller and weaker.[14]

[11] See bibliography.

[12] See *Unos annales* [since 1528] (1939).

[13] There are reasons to suspect that Vicente Yáñez Pinzón and Juan Díaz de Solis also showed up 1508- 09 before Yucatán: Thomas (2003): 73; perhaps even at San Juan de Ulúa (at today's Veracruz) [Miralles Ostos (2001): 26f.; but against it Manzano Manzano (1988), vol. 2, lám. XIII]. The records of Garay's expeditions have been lost, and the question of the extent to which Portuguese ships have already sailed the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico before Colón will probably never be clarified again due to the loss of sources in the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. The anecdote about the helmet of the Huitzilopochtli is remarkable. (Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. XXXVIII, 96.); Had a European helmet already reached Tenochtitlán before the conquista? Miralles Ostos (2001): 110. The conquistadors do not report that they found such evidence in the Huitzilopochtli temple of Tenochtitlán or anywhere else in New Spain. However, it is doubtful that they would have recognized them at all.

[14] See Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. I-XVII, 5-44.

What the Aztecs did not suspect was that Cortés was of a completely different caliber than his precursors. Cortés, who through the preceding expeditions had heard about how rich the Mexica were, before his departure had already betrayed his superior Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar, the governor of Cuba, to whom the fleet and the soldiers were actually subordinated.[15] Without having an exact idea of the state of the Aztecs, Cortés had already firmly decided in advance to conquer this state and other territories in Mexico. From the very beginning, he himself claimed, he had resolved to "capture or kill or subjugate" the Aztec ruler.[16] Since he knew that Velázquez would charge him with mutiny and treason at the Spanish Crown, there was only one option for him to save his head: first, he had to conquer Mexico, and second, he had to capture a lot of gold. Kings in Europe always needed gold, and emperors in particular. And how much Charles V needed this gold right now, even Cortés during the conquest did not suspect.[17]

The firm intention to conquer Mexico under these circumstances was actually crazy by today's standards, and apparently unthinkable by Aztec standards as well. And that is why they did not expect at all that the small group under Cortés could be somehow dangerous. Cortés did not even have a conquest plan at first. How could he, knowing so little about Mexico? Cortés also had practically no military experience until then.[18] However, one of his strengths was his ability to learn quickly and to adapt to unknown situations. Initially, he provided himself with interpreters. He knew that some Spaniards had been shipwrecked eight years earlier on the Yucatán coast and figured out that by now, if they were still alive, they would be able to speak the Mayan language pretty well. So he headed for the coast of Yucatán and, during a stopover in November 1519, managed to insure himself one of these Spaniards, Jerónmo de Aguilar.[19] Later a young Indian woman of maybe 15 years, who went down in history as Malinche,[20] came into his power, [21] who spoke both Maya and Náhuatl, so that the translation chain was closed. Cortés thus dominated the channel of communication between Aztecs and Spaniards.[22]

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[15] See Instrucciones de Diego Velázquez a Hernán Cortés (Santiago de Cuba, 23 de octubre de 1518), in: *Documentos cortesianos*, vol. 1, (1993): 45-57.

[16] "Certifiqué a Vuestra Alteza que lo habría preso o muerto o súbdito a la corona real de Vuestra Majestad". Cortés [1522] (1993), segunda relación: 162. He claims to have already written this in his first letter (1519). This statement is not found in the *Carta de Veracruz*. If there really was a "*primera relación*", it has not yet been found.

[17] Cédula de Carlos V pidiendo dinero a Hernán Cortés (Valladolid, 10 December 1523), in: *Documentos cortesianos*, vol. 1, (1993): 276. In this letter the monarch is asking Cortés, "de me enviar la más suma de oro que vos fuere posible".

[18] Miralles Ostos (2001): 75.

[19] Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. XXIX, 69-71.

[20] Glantz (2013).

[21] Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación, 192.

[22] In 1984 Todorov put forward the thesis that Cortés succeeded in conquering Mexico mainly because of his genius for communication. However, he relied primarily on Sahagún, which he

He knew how to use it. While visiting the region of today's Veracruz shortly after his arrival at the recently Aztec-subdued Totonac (at the Gulf Coast), he witnessed the arrogant appearance of five tribute collectors of the Aztec Triple Alliance.[23] They felt so confident with the Aztec military power behind them that they dared to move between the subjects without further military protection. And here the diplomatic dangerousness of Cortés became apparent for the first time. He managed, by means of his interpreters, to persuade the Totonacian ruler, who entered the chronicles as "cacique gordo" (fat chief), to seize and imprison the five representatives of the hated Triple Alliance.[24] That was a casus belli, and so the Spanish conquistadors had found an ally against the Aztecs. The Totonac had just as little a military chance against the Aztecs as the Spaniards of Cortés—and also together they had none. But the Totonac knew Central Mexico, they knew the cities, knew how big they were, how they stood with the Aztecs and who their inhabitants were, and they knew the ways there, i.e. the main roads, the shortcuts and the rat runs. But above all, the Totonac had a plan. Before Cortés appeared on the scene, they just had no one to implement it: The aim was to forge an alliance among the opponents of the Triple Alliance, but above all to secure the support of those who were actually able to withstand the Aztecs military power—the Tlaxcaltecs. Tlaxcala was an area that lay like an island in the midst of areas that the Triple Alliance had already knuckled down. In the southern core it consisted of four allied principalities, to which more or less loose further Otomí areas were assigned in the north. The culture of the Tlaxcaltecs was more modest than that of the Totonac or the Mexica, but the Tlaxcaltecs were so skilled at war crafts that the Mexica had never managed to subdue them.[25]

Cortés decided to insure the support of the Tlaxcaltecs and Totonac. But he played double-cross. After persuading the Totonac to appoint the tribute collectors, he helped them escape the following night and gave them the message that the Spaniards were the friends of the Mexica. Cortés pointed out that he wanted a meeting with Motecuhzoma because he allegedly had an important message to deliver to him from Emperor Charles V,[26] who as Charles I together with his mother Juana was also King of Spain. With this he tried to obtain a kind of diplomatic status, which he assumed would bring with it a certain inviolability also in Mexico.

Motecuhzoma, who held the supreme office of *huey tlatoani in* Tenochtitlán, the most powerful city of the Triple Alliance, which gave him much power but did not make him the absolute king, sent rich gifts to the emperor. Cortés may have interpreted this as an act of submission, but Motecuhzoma probably only wanted to demonstrate his power and

uncritically reads as an objective representation of history. Communication was certainly an important issue, but not the only one.

[23] Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. XLVI, 113.

[24] Ibid, cap. XLVII, 115.

[25] Buceta (2010).

[26] Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación, 197.

richness to his distant colleague. The legend initiated by Cortés, that the Aztecs thought the Spaniards were gods or specifically their returning god Quetzalcóatl, has been meticulously refuted by Werner Stenzel since 1980.[27] Cortés sent a lot of gold and artistic objects to the emperor and together with the Totonac set off to Tlaxcala.

The Totonac plan was daring. It is an indication of how hated the Aztecs must have been with them. Moreover, it was not a self-runner, because the Tlaxcaltecs were at first by no means enthusiastic about it and even attacked the 300-600 Totonac[28] and the 450 Spaniards fiercely. A faction of Tlaxcaltec rulers under the leadership of the older, blind Xicoténcatl was probably not averse to an alliance, but the Tlaxcaltec troops were under the command of his warlike son, the younger Xicoténcatl, who mistrusted the Spaniards and did not even think about making common cause with them. Spanish sources claim that the Spaniards finally defeated the Tlaxcaltecs after several days,[29] but this is hardly convincing given that the military strength of the Tlaxcaltecs remained very significant throughout the war. It was rather the case that the older politicians brought the young hotspur under control, which had actually kept the Spaniards pretty much in suspense. Not only had the first Spaniards died a violent death, but also—which weighed more heavily—one of the 16 horses.[30] Parts of the dead horse were shown all over Tlaxcala, so that even if some Indians should have believed this from now on nobody could be convinced any more that the Spaniards were invincible gods.

Was the alliance that was now being formed meant seriously by the Tlaxcaltecs, or was it a trap? A lot of Spaniards weren't so sure. We do not know what Motecuhzoma and the other tripartite states thought about the Spaniards.[31] But Cortés reckoned that the Aztecs were now slowly realizing that something was compassed against them, that they were waiting somewhere behind the Tlaxcaltec border with their army for him to fall into their trap. He also suspected that the younger Xicoténcatl, who was allied with him against his will, was only waiting for an opportunity to stab him in the back. The nerves of the Spaniards were shattered.

Why did the Spaniards not move directly to Tenochtitlán, but instead took the detour via the large city of Cholula, which was already under the control of the Triple Alliance? Did they want to neutralize a potential enemy in their back? Was it a courtesy which the Tlaxcaltecs had demanded for the Alliance? Or was Cortés planning from the outset to polish up his scratched reputation with an example—today we would speak of *shock and awe tactics*—in order to gain respect in this way among those small states that swayed? Or

[27] Stenzel (1980), Camilla Townsend (2003) apparently does not know Stenzel at all and does not reach his argumentative depth either.

[28] Miralles Ostos (2001): 130.

[29] Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación, 176-183.

[30] Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. LXIII, 153.

[31] The depictions of Bernardino de Sahagún, who refers to Aztec eyewitnesses, are marked by apocalyptic and retrospective historical interpretations that have little or nothing to do with historical facts. Rozat Dupeyron (1993).

was Cholula the sample for the plan that already matured in him for the conquest of Tenochtitlán?

It is important to note at this point that it is by no means certain that the claim of Cortés and the other Spaniards is correct, that they always determined which way to go. There is much to suggest that the events since the alliance with the Tlaxcaltecs were in part more like an Indian-Mexican war, in which the Spaniards under Cortés were involved; sometimes they tipped of the scales, but by no means always and certainly had the power to command.[32]

If the Mexica had wanted to defeat Cortés at that time, then Cholula would have been the perfect place. If the Spaniards had left the city behind, the Aztecs could have attacked Tlaxcala from there, which had largely sent its army away with Cortés. But when the conquistadors arrived in the city, they could be ambushed with archers hidden on the flat roofs. So the Spaniards moved to Cholula together with the Tlaxcaltecs. Cortés seized the upper class of Cholula immediately after his welcome and took them hostage. Bartolomé de Las Casas, one of the strongest opponents of Cortés, claims that the Spaniards, together with several thousand other Cholultecs, now slaughtered them without any further reason.[33] Cortés himself writes that it was the interpreter Malinche who asserted to have heard of these hostages being ambushed by the Aztecs, who sent Motecuhzoma to Cholula,[34] while others say that the Tlaxcaltecs warned her. Some suspect that the Tlaxcaltecs wanted to rush the Spaniards to the Cholultecs out of pure malice,[35] others believe that the Cholultecs actually planned a sneak attack.[36] Be it that they felt really threatened, be it that it was only important to the victors to present the events afterwards as legitimate defence—Spaniards and Tlaxcaltes on 18 October 1519 savaged the population of Cholula and committed a massacre. No Aztec army was found, by the way.

The Mexica under Motecuhzoma kept on waiting. Apparently they intended to let the Spaniards into their lagoon city and then decide there how to deal with them. In the middle

[32] The episode that Vázquez de Tapia reports in relation to his and Pedro de Alvarado's mission to scout the lagoon of Mexico from Tlaxcala speaks for this. On the way there, he says, the Tlaxcaltecs tried to kill them. The Aztecs in their company would have saved them, but not shown them the way to Tenochtitlán, but led them to a spot of the lagoon from where they could only see the city in the distance. On the shore of the lagoon then he would not have scouted the Aztecs but Motecuhzoma incognito scouted them instead. (Vázquez de Tapia [ca. 1544] (1953): 36; somewhat different: Cervantes de Salazar [1575] (1985): lib. III, cap. LII, 246) Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. LXXX, 193-194 claims that Vázquez de Tapia had a fever on the way, so that they had to return before reaching the lagoon. This calls the whole episode into question.

[33] Las Casas, Brevísima relación de la destruición de las Indias [1552], in: *Obras*, vol. 10, (1992): 49-50.

[34] Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación: 191-194; López de Gómara [1552] (1943): vol. 1, cap. LIX, 193.

[35] Sahagún [ca. 1580] (1927): lib. XII, cap. XI, 477ff.

[36] Lienzo de Tlaxcala. ca. 1550-1585] (1979): lámina 9; Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. LXXXIII, 200.

of the capital the few hundred intruders seemed to be a calculable risk. After all, they would be trapped there like a mouse. Moreover, they could no longer wander around the Aztec sphere of influence and cause unrest.

On 8 November 1519 the time had come: the Spaniards, together with their Tlaxcaltec reinforcers, moved into the Aztec capital via the great dam road from Iztapalapa. Motecuhzoma received them. In his report to Charles V Cortés now states verbatim what the *huey tlatoani* had said to him on this occasion, essentially, that he, Motecuhzoma, was pleased that he (Cortés) had finally come and that he (Motecuhzoma) had only administered for a while the place here in his (Cortés') name which now belonged to him, to Cortés.[37] This should sound to European readers as if Motecuhzoma had subjected himself,[38] as if he was a kind of 'Emperor of Mexico'—piquantly not to Charles V but to Cortés. But on the one hand it is unlikely that Cortés understood exactly what he was told through his translation chain, secondly Motecuhzoma would not have had the right to decide on a subjugation of the Triple Alliance alone, and thirdly he would not have had any reason to do so. The traditional staging of the welcome-procedure suggests that he said something like "mi casa tu casa" in an appropriately flowery way—but felt in a very, very superior position vis-à-vis to Cortés. This was a fatal mistake.

The Spaniards were given the palace of Axayácatl, the father of Moctezuma, in the city centre as their quarters, which like all Aztec palaces also had a walled courtyard, within walking distance of the palace of Motecuhzoma, which stood in the place where the National Palace of the State of Mexico now is situated. As far as the credibility of the Spanish sources is concerned, one has to cut back on the many friendly visits between Motecuhzoma and Cortés. Cortés will not have waited six days with the capture of Motecuhzoma, as allege the conquistadors' reports.[39] The version of Sahagún, for example, let us suggest that his cousin Francisco Pizarro later copied pretty much exactly what had worked for Cortés: take the most powerful person hostage immediately[40] and control the country with him as a puppet ruler, and above all to seize the treasury and find out where the gold mines could be found.[41] Cortés needed the gold to conciliate the king and to

[37] Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación, 210-211.

[38] Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. LXI, 146-147 puts the saying in the mouth of a vassal Motecuhzomas that he can master everything he wants to do. He himself calls him "rey desta Nueva Expaña". (Ibid., cap. XCVII, 259). Cortés describes him as more splendid than any other "sultan" or pagan ruler (Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación, 247-248).

[39] Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación: 216.

[40] Sahagún [ca. 1580] (1927): lib. XII, cap. XVII, 493 Immediately after Motecuhzoma gave his welcoming address to Cortés, the Náhuatl version reads: "Then they took him by the hand/guided him in this way/grabbed him with their fist/showed him their love./And the Spaniards see him, watch him/continue on foot/they climb up (on horseback), descend again/by looking at him". On the same page it is explicitly said that Motecuhzoma was captured since then, and no one dared to defend him.

[41] Martínez (1992): 252.

pay his troops, which otherwise received no guerdon.[42] According to Spanish sources, the Spaniards found the treasure of Axayácatl while masonry work in their quarters.[43] It is much more probable that, just as Pizarro and Almagro promised freedom to the Inca ruler Atahuallpa for a high ransom, they also did with Motecuhzoma and other persons of the Aztec high nobility. The Aztec state, which was organized strictly hierarchically, was paralyzed for the time being. But it was only a fictitious victory. The problem was that Motecuhzoma was not an absolute ruler. In addition, his reputation dwindled the faster, the more it became clear to the outside that he was firmly in the hands of the Spaniards and that it was not foreseeable if or when they would release him again.

In this situation a new chance seemed to open up for the oppressed Aztecs: The governor of Cuba had sent Pánfilo de Narváez to Mexico to capture Cortés and bring him to Cuba. Narváez had landed in Mexico with a force three times the size of the one of Cortés. The Aztecs were the first to know, but the Totonac informed Cortés. With a selected troop he hurried back to the coast, overpowered Narváez at night, bribed his officers, and promised the rest of the newcomers' mountains of gold if they followed him, and they did.[44] So Cortés returned to Tenochtitlán with more than 1000 Spaniards.[45]

But in the meantime an uprising had broken out in Tenochtitlán. Pedro de Alvarado had held the position with only about 100 men. When the situation seemed him too dangerous, he took advantage of the occasion of a festival on 20 or 22 May 1520, in which almost the entire Aztec upper class took part. So he had the entrances closed and then caused a bloodbath at the Aztec aristocracy. When Cortés came back, the city was in a great turmoil. According to his report, the Aztecs let him move in again.[46] Maybe they still believed they could control him better in the middle of the city. But perhaps, as Durán suggests, Cortés was already back in town and was persuaded by Alvarado to the bloodbath that led to the uprising.[47] To distract the guilt from himself, he may then have backdated his arrival in the city. Alvarado, who was very brave but did not have the foresight of Cortés, remained loyal to his *capitán general* and did not contradict him.

The new strong man in Tenochtitlán was Cuitláhuac, a brother of Motecuhzoma. He now set about fighting the Spaniards, Totonac and Tlaxcaltecs uncompromisingly. The Spaniards in the capital were besieged and threatened either to be worn out or to starve to death. Since he had not prevented the massacre, Motecuhzoma's reputation with the Aztecs was gone. Cortés also accused him of having planned a common cause with Narváez

[42] Huber (2018): 79-168.

[43] Tapia [after 1547] (1939): 79 and Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. XCIII, 243.

[44] Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. CXXV, 338-339.

[45] The best study of all conquistadors who fought under Cortés is Grunberg 1993—on over 3,300 pages. 1,212 he was able to identify of approximately 2,100 conquistadors who joined Cortés in 1519-21, including at least one black African, 17 Portuguese, 13 Italians, five Greeks and one Flemish. (Ibid.: 30.)

[46] Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación: 269-270.

[47] Durán [ca. 1579-1581] (1967), vol. 2: cap. LXXV, 546.

against him,[48] so that the formerly most powerful man in Mexico was now caught between all stools. Although the Spanish eyewitness accounts (with one exception)[49] present it differently,[50] I believe that Cortés murdered Motecuhzoma, who was useless to him in this situation.[51]

The only option left for the Spaniards was to escape from the city via one of the causeways to the saving Tlaxcala. But that was easier said than done, because for defensive reasons the dam roads led over wooden bridges that could be dismantled, so that the causeways were interrupted by large gaps filled with water. The Aztecs had already removed them to prevent the Spaniards from escaping. Cortés therefore had mobile bridges built.[52] In the night from 29 to 30 June the breakout took place, which from a Spanish point of view in the history of conquest became famous as the *Noche Triste* (sad night). The trapped followed the causeway to the coastal town of Tacuba because it was the shortest way to the shore. But of course the Spaniards' departure did not go unnoticed for long, and it was easy to catch them up with boats and attack them from all sides. The Spaniards lost all their guns and almost all their gold,[53] probably about 60% of them were killed,[54] of the allied Tlaxcaltecs probably almost all died. But in spite of all these losses, it was possible to survive for those persons who were decisive for the final conquest of Tenochtitlán: Cortés, all his important officers,[55] the interpreter Malinche, who also learned to speak Spanish and even negotiated on her own in the style of Cortés,[56] as well as an extremely capable

[48] Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. CXXVI, 341.

[49] Aguilar [1560] (1980): 70f.

[50] Decisive: Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación: 272.

[51] Bei Durán [ca. 1579-1581] (1967), vol. 2: chap. LXXVI, 552 one can read: "When the Spaniards fled from Mexico [. . .], this story says that the Mexicans went into the apartments to look for their king Motecuhzoma to execute in him no less cruelties than in the Spaniards had executed and that, going to look for him in the apartments, they found him dead, with a chain at his feet and five stab wounds in the chest, and next to him, many chiefs and lords, who were imprisoned together in his company, all stabbed to death."

[52] Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación, 279.

[53] Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación, 280.

[54] The source statements to the killed vary very strongly from 150 (Cortés) to 1,170 (Oviedo). For the source discussion see Martínez (1992): 273 and Grunberg (1993): 103.

[55] Pedro the Alvarado who commanded the rearguard is said to have saved his live by an impressive jump over one of the gaps. Till today the location in México City is called “salto de Alvarado”. All his men except four or ten Spaniards were killed. (López de Gómara [1552] (1943): vol. 1, cap. CX, 311.)

[56] This becomes clear not least in the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, a large-format picture story only preserved in copies, in which the Tlaxcaltecs rendered their services in the conquista for the Spanish crown. Marina alias Malinche alias Malintzin plays an outstanding role here. She is often accompanied by the Cortés, drawn of the same size as he is (lám. 9 [Cholula], 45 [Tenochtitlán]). She even acts as a commanding officer or at least messenger of commands for the Spaniards. She often performs the same gestures as Cortés (lám. 11, 27, 28, 29), so that both figures merge in principle. The fact that Cortés was also referred to by Indians as "Malinche" is also passed down in the chronicles. (Díaz del

shipwright, Martín López, who would later guide the construction of ships with whose help the city was finally captured.[57]

The Spaniards were now on the western shore of the lagoon, but not yet in Tlaxcala, located to the east of it. This time the Aztecs did not wait any longer in their city, but shifted the way for the 600 wounded Spaniards, who now had to fight practically without allies and firearms. For the second time, the Aztecs could have saved their authority over central Mexico. With a little luck, e.g. an arrow that would have fatally hit Cortés, history would have been quite different. Probably posterity would have declared Cortés a megalomaniac adventurer who had no chance with his company from the very beginning. But it was not to be: Cortés survived this day, too. Instead, the Spaniards succeeded in killing the Aztec commander with his easily recognizable feather ornaments.[58] Then the Aztec army fled. Here, once again, the strict hierarchy within Aztec society proved to be a decisive disadvantage. In the Spanish troop everyone fought voluntarily.[59] In the Mexican army they did not. What weighed worse, however, was that this defeat sealed the downfall of the Aztec power. From now on it was merely a question of whether they would be allowed to continue to exist as second-class power or not even as this.

The Spaniards fought their way through and finally reached Tlaxcaltec territory. Were they safe now? The question arose how seriously the Tlaxcaltecs would take their alliance. Everything depended of them now. And here it became clear how important the battle of Otumba had been in two respects: Not only had the Spaniards survived in their core, but they had proved that even weary and in the open field they could take on the entire Aztec army all alone. That must have been demotivating for the Mexica, maybe even a shock. No Indian opponent could have resisted them in this situation. This revealed a decisive disadvantage in weapons technology: not the horses and not the small cannons or even the cumbersome arquebuses of the conquistadors to be fired with fuses were decisive for the war. They had more of a psychological effect on the opponents. But the iron protection and the iron cut and thrust weapons were really effective. The Mexica themselves—in contrast to the Incas or Tarascans—did not have metal weapons. Instead, they used blades and tips made of obsidian, a volcanic glass formed as an extrusive igneous rock. This was very sharp and therefore also dangerous, if it hit on soft surfaces like the necks of the horses. But on the steel of European weapons it fragmented. The Aztecs probably in this first (and only) field-fight still tried to take Spaniards captive in order to be able to sacrifice

Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. CLVI, 507, for example: Cuhautémoc addresses Cortés as "Señor Malinche".)

[57] Cortés had 13 dismountable brigantines, each with a small gun, built in Tlaxcala under the direction of the shipwrights Martín López. See Cortés [1520/1522] (1993): segunda relación, 306 and tercera relación, 311 and 374.

[58] Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación, 286.

[59] The best proof of this can be found in the letter that the troops of the Cortés wrote to the Emperor: Carta del ejército de Cortés al emperador (Oct. 1520), in: *Documentos cortesianos*, vol. 1, (1993): 156-163.

them while the Spaniards simply killed their enemies. During the later siege the Aztecs had learned from this mistake and proved to be quite adaptable in warfare. But for an Aztec warrior who had no iron breastplate and no iron sword, it was much more difficult to kill a Spaniard than vice versa.

The Tlaxcaltecs were impressed by the Spaniards' victory at Otumba and remained loyal to the alliance. That was, as already pointed out, the beginning of the end of the Aztec rule in Mexico. The myth of the invincibility of the Aztec army was gone. The peoples of Mexico, who only held still for fear of the Aztecs, began to consider whether the time had come to finally shake off the Aztec yoke. And now the perhaps decisive blow took place, which nobody could count on at that time: A deadly epidemic affected the then densely populated highlands of Mexico, which depopulated entire regions by up to 90%.[60] A black man from the troop of Narváez is said to have brought them in.[61] Whether it was perhaps smallpox or, as the Spaniards believed, measles, can no longer be said with certainty. What is certain is that the epidemic acted like a terrible biological weapon. The people of America had no experience at all with numerous diseases of the Old World and did not know what could help against them. Above all, their immune system had no defense against it. In this situation, in which pathogens can spread virtually unhindered, medicine speaks of *virgin soil encounter*. The virus did not stop at anyone—just at the Europeans. Totonacs died, Tlaxcaltecs too, but above all the Aztecs in their city. This pestilence weakened them decisively. The conquistador Vázquez de Tapia interpreted the fact deuteronomistically:

> Many great men died in this plague, warriors, princes, military leaders and brave men with whom we would have had to fight and take them as enemies. And miraculously Our Lord killed them and destroyed them before us.[62]

Tenochtitlán's *huey tlatoani* Cuitláhuac died on 25 November 1520.[63] This was an event that, if one adds Alvarado's massacre of the Aztec aristocracy and the murder of Motecuhzoma to that, one could actually say that the Aztec dominium was decapitated here.

The rest is told quickly. The Spaniards recovered in Tlaxcala. They received supplies, of which some were actually intended for Narváez or even came from Spain.[64] With lures and violence, Cortés also gathered more and more Indian allies around him. Those who did not support him were attacked. The Aztecs noticed that the noose tightened around them and asked for help. But practically no one came. Here the probably essential weak point of their

[60] For the entire Central Mexican region, the highest estimates for 1519 are based on approx. 25 million inhabitants, for 1568 only slightly more than 2.5 million. (Borah/Cook 1962: 5).

[61] López de Gómara [1552] (1943): vol. 1, cap. II, 291.

[62] Vázquez de Tapia [ca. 1544] (1953): 46.

[63] Martínez (1992): 41.

[64] Martínez (1992): 280-282.

rule becomes clear, which was basically built only on fear: Nobody in Mexico admired the Aztecs for their wise statesmanship or their legislation or for other civilizing blessings which they had bestowed on their subjects. There was no Aztec idea of state like there was a Roman one. No one identified with them, no one loved them.

On the contrary, when the Spaniards in May 1521 returned to the lagoon with their allies—this time there were many 10,000[65]—and the siege began at sea and on land, the former subjects showed all their hatred against the once so powerful Tenochtitlán. The conquest took place in such a way that the besiegers conquered the city bit by bit and immediately tore down the buildings.[66] Cortés himself after the *Noche Triste* never again had more than 1000 Spaniards, despite the occasional supplies. These in turn were divided into the three causeways, so that one can assume that they basically only appeared in company strengths—surrounded by thousands of allies each. It's obvious that Cortés could not have been almighty here. A charismatic leader among his allies could have prevented Mexico from becoming a Spanish colony. Such a leader was the younger Xicoténcatl, and so Cortés ordered him killed. Nevertheless, the situation was extremely precarious for the Spaniards, and in the later trials against Cortés there are accusations that during the siege he tolerated every cruelty and every cult practices including cannibalism among his allies.[67] This is not completely unlikely.

Tenochtitlán thus became smaller from day to day and on 13 August 1521, the day of surrender, after 75 days of fighting it was 80% destroyed. Since 1519, probably more than half of the Aztecs had lost their lives as a result of the epidemic, hunger and fighting. In the *Annals of Tlatelolco* one can read:

> On the paths lay broken [human] bones, addleheaded hair, the roofs of the houses are uncovered, the dwellings are red (of blood), the worms swarmed in the streets. The masonry is covered with brains, the water is like reddish, like coloured water. That's how we drank it.[68]

Bernal Díaz del Castillo assures ("digo que juro, amén") that there were so many corpses lying around in the city that it was only possible to move over bodies and the stench could not be endured.[69] Cortés granted free passage to the starving survivors. The move lasted

[65] There is little evidence to support the estimation of army strength, since the conquistadors themselves in their reports always exaggerate this unrestrainedly with their opponents, but only sporadically mention those of their allies in order to emphasize their own achievement. Here one get the impression again and again that an unbeatable bunch of Spaniards fought their way through endless seas of enemies.

[66] Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. CLII, 476.

[67] E.g. Informatción promovida por Diego Velázquez contra Hernán Cortés (Santiago de Cuba, 28.06.-06.07.1521), in: *Documentos cortesianos*. Vol. 1. (1993): Diego de Ávila, 201.

[68] Unos annales [since 1528] (1939): § 348, 155. This passage can only be found in the copy Ms. Mex. 22bis, page 47.

[69] Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. CLVI, 509-510.

three days, because many were too weak to get over the causeways faster.[70] Tenochtitlán, once the heart of the Aztec tribute empire, was now only an uninhabited landscape of ruins. Alexander von Humboldt in his *Mexico-Werk* at the beginning of the nineteenth century still writes:

> What today is called the Barrio of Santiago is only a small part of the old Tlatelolco. But on the way to Tlalnepantla and the Ahuahuetes [Cupressus disticha L.], you walk for over an hour through the ruins of the old city. There you can see (as on the street of Tacuba and Ixtapalapa) how much smaller Mexico, rebuilt by Cortés, is than Tenochtitlan was under the last Moctezuma.[71]

3 The Political Decline of the Aztecs

While the Aztec culture proved to be surprisingly stable in many ways, the political downfall of the Mexica was almost complete. Although Cortés confirmed the surviving last *huey tlatoani*, Cuauhtémoc, in office,[72] he was no longer the most powerful man in Mexico, but only a henchman of the Spaniards for the Indio slums of the new city of México, which from then on was divided into the *ciudad de españoles* and the *ciudad de indios*. Those of the surviving ruling class who were not co-operating were killed. The Spaniards were particularly brutal with the Aztec priests, by publicly hanging them or having them mauled by dogs.[73] The Aztecs were thus deprived of their upper class and the power to interpret their own history. The paralyzed survivors were no longer to be expected to perform outstanding cultural achievements, and this was also in the mind of the conquerors.

From the imperial structures of the Aztecs as well as from other violently subdued states the Spaniards preserved only those holders of power and office who could not become dangerous to them. Otherwise, the few hundred Spaniards who, for security reasons alone, did not spread across the country, but lived in the centres of the newly founded Spanish cities, would not have been able to control the many millions of Indians.[74]

Unlike in the former Inca state there was never an Indian uprising in Mexico. This also suggests that there was no consciousness of having once been part of an "Aztec empire". Instead, the Spaniards gave them an awareness of being part of a Spanish empire: Mexico, as *Nueva España,* became a Viceroyalty, which, if it had been autonomous, in wealth, size and population would have been able to easily compete with any European state. But above

[70] Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. CLVI, 510-509.

[71] Humboldt: Mexico-Werk, book III, vol. 4, [1825-27] (1991): 257.

[72] Cortés [1522] (1993): tercera relación, 427.

[73] E.g. Muñoz Camargo, Ms. Hunter [ca. 1550-1599] (1984), cuaderno 13.

[74] Gibson (1964), Lockhart (1992).

all, it was part of the Spanish overseas empire that spanned the globe at the time. Not only Tlaxcala, but also Tenochtitlán, now Spanish in its core, was given its own coat of arms,[75] the Indian high nobility was equated with the Spanish,[76] and at least nominally there were no "colonies", but only Castilian "provinces" in America. Among the Christianized Indians, to which belonged also the Aztecs, there were just at the beginning quite a few who tried to outbid each other in large festive events to present themselves as important members of this empire.[77] The fact that the Spaniards had already gambled away this loan during the sixteenth century is another story.

After the allies of the Spaniards had already made sure that the archives of the Triple Alliance went up in flames,[78] so that the historical and political foundations of the Triple Alliance were forgotten as far as possible or not even known to the Spaniards, the Christian missionaries, who followed the conquerors, hunted for Indian codices. They had understood that religion touched every area of life in this world and therefore decided to destroy the scriptures dealing with this religion.—That is to say: all of the scriptures, then. Among these missionaries, however, there were also some very interesting personalities like Fray Benavente 'Motolinía' O.F.M. or Fray Bernardino de Sahagún O.F.M. The latter in no way only proceeded destructively, but partly first viewed the codices, then deciphered them with the help of survivors or Christianized pupils and finally reinterpreted the results on Náhuatl in Latin script and in the context of Christian salvation history.

An interesting and actually quite mysterious exception are the anonymous *Annals of Tlatelolco*. Tlatelolco was the twin city of Tenochtitlán and involuntarily shared its fate during the years of its conquest. Tlatelolco had always been the rival of Tenochtitlán and did not belong to the Triple Alliance. Since it was a little less destroyed than Tenochtitlán, the Franciscans settled in its former sacral centre—at the today's *Plaza de las tres Culturas*. In this monastery young aristocratic Aztecs were instructed in Christian faith and European techniques—also in writing. But the *Annals of Tlatelolco* hardly show any Christian influence, although the authors actually must have been at least nominally Christians and could hardly have written secretly. This is the only source that does not date back to the time before the conquest, but (although from the perspective of one of Tenochtitlán's opponents) at least can be considered largely purely Indian—unless it is also an attempt at a historical version that seems deceptively authentic to us today, which only pretends to be Indian. This was a trick used by the educated missionaries. Fray Bernadino de Sahagún in particular wrote over 40 years of his history about the Aztec culture and history, both in Náhuatl and in Spanish. The Spanish version was intended to deceive the Spanish authorities, who did not understand Náhuatl, and the Náhuatl version was intended to

[75] Don Carlos (04.07.1523), In: *Libro primero de actas*. (1889): 211-212.

[76] For the fate of the descendants of Motecuhzoma see Alvarado Tezozómoc [ca. 1570-1600] (2004): § 304g-324e/299-315.

[77] Hinz (2005): 517.

[78] E.g. in Texcoco: Gruzinski (1988): 26.

deceive the Indians of Mexico, who had only a vague idea of the former Aztec religion and history. This means that the Spanish version is by no means always an exact translation of the Náhuatl version. What is exciting for our topic is how the decline of the Aztec empire is interpreted here. It claims that Motecuhzoma awaited Cortés as the returning god Quetzalcóatl, prepared rich gifts for him and instructed his envoys to worship him on his arrival and to dress him in costumes made for gods.[79] The scene is supposed to demonstrate how blinded the as yet unchristianized ancestors of the Christianized Aztecs were in their pagan superstition and that it was their naive pagan belief that brought them to doom.

Chronicles written by monks (Codex Ramírez, Motolinía, Sahagún, Durán and others) report that Motecuhzoma, who also held priestly functions and who in the eyes of his subjects represented the image of divine power, had seen evil Omina immediately before the Spanish conquest, which on closer examination appear abundantly Spanish or are taken from the Bible, Tacitus and Flavius Josephus' *Jewish War*. In Sahagún these Omina are a ´pillar of fire´, the fire of the temple of Huitzilopochtli, the fire of the temple of Xiuhtecutli [sc. God of fire], a ´comet´ (rather a meteor according to the description), the foaming of the lagoon, a screaming ghost woman, a crane-like bird with a magic mirror on its head, in which Motecuhzoma sees strange warriors, and the frequent encounter of people with two heads.[80] Although pagan, Motecuhzoma in this interpretation had felt God's omnipotence. He sees a comet, which in Christian tradition indicates the coming of God, and knows that the hours of his pagan rule are numbered.

His passivity, puzzling to the Spaniards, is here interpreted in such a way that Motecuhzoma simply knew that he could do nothing against the invaders who came as instruments of the almighty God. This is where the image of the hesitant, superstitious and melancholic ruler of the Aztecs, which Cortés invented[81] and which can still be found in specialist literature.[82] As already mentioned, Motecuhzoma probably suffered more from overestimation of his own abilities than from anxiety. For Christian readers, Cortés does not become a god here, but a new Moses who liberates the Aztecs from the clutches of their caste of priests possessed by the devil and practicing human sacrifices, and who—to complete the mission of their likewise diabolical tribal god Huitzilopochtli—now really

[79] In the Náhuatl version it literally says: "Then they prayed to him, said to him: ' It hears the God!/it worships him (greets him)/his vassal Motecuhçoma.'" (Sahagún [ca. 1580] (1927): lib. XII, cap. V, 264). The political opponents of the Cortés already presented a similar picture in the past, so that it is not unlikely that Cortés actually allowed himself to be worshipped God-like in the beginning. E.g. Informatción promovida por Diego Velázquez contra Hernán Cortés (Santiago de Cuba, 28.06.-06.07.1521), in: *Documentos cortesianos*. Vol. 1. (1993): Juan Álvarez, 205.

[80] Sahagún [ca. 1580] (1927): lib. XII, cap. I, 453-546.

[81] Cortés [1520] (1993): segunda relación: 197.

[82] E.g. Martínez (1992): 39.

transferred them to the Promised Land, to Mexico itself, and—this is to be emphasized with regard to the subject of empires—established a new empire of God in Mexico.[83]

That is how Cortés saw himself. And that is what he wanted to show on the outside. If he already regarded his conquest of a culture that sacrificed human beings as a kind of crusade,[84] he himself, at least according to his loyal officer Tapia, had a partial need to preach to the Indians instead of his field chaplains.[85] Christianity was the main component of the legitimation from which, according to his argumentation, the dominion of the Aztecs could be destroyed—indeed *had to* be destroyed.

Nothing should remain of the pagan religion, which had actually been state-supporting for the Mexica.[86] This meant not only the murder of the priests but also the disappearance of the partly gigantic temple pyramids. While these had been erected layer by layer by the subjects of the Aztecs in hard labor and then bloodily inaugurated with human sacrifices of the same subjects in regular acts of imperial building, the Spaniards now forced the Aztecs to remove the ruins of the sacral center and in particular its pyramids in no less exhausting labor.

The Franciscan Fray Benavente "Motolinía" wrote:

> There were so many people who went to the works that a man could hardly wind his way through some streets, although they were very wide; and during the works, some were struck by the beams, others fell from above, others were buried under the buildings that they were demolishing [...], especially when they were demolishing the main temples of the devil. Many Indians died there, and it took many years to tear them apart.[87]

From the stones of the main temple, once dedicated to Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc, the cathedral of Mexico was built right next to it.

4 Reception

The violent end of the Aztecs in the form of a heroic myth of doom became important for the independent state of Mexico. Despite all the destruction, the Spaniards made a considerable contribution to this. Firstly, they dealt more extensively with the Aztecs in

[83] E.g. Carta de Fr. Toribio de Motolinía (02.01.1555), in: *Colección de documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento*, vol. 7, (1867): 279.

[84] Not only López de Gómara [1552] (1943): vol. I, cap. VIII, 62 reports of a Cortés cross flag with the Latin banner alluding to Constantine: "Friends, let's follow the cross. And when we have faith, we shall prevail in this sign". Miralles Ostos (2001): 117 also mentions further evidence in the sense that Cortés saw his expedition as a crusade.

[85] Tapia [after 1547] (1939): 70.

[86] This also applies to the Indian districts, so that Alexander von Humboldt already in 1803 "finds almost no trace of old Mexican buildings". (Humboldt [1808-1811] (1991): 268).

[87] Benavente [1540] (1914): resigned. I, cap. I, 17.

their writings than with other Mexican states; secondly, by establishing the European capital at the centres of former Aztec power, they drew permanent attention to these very places; and thirdly, for practical reasons, the missionaries during colonial times ensured that the Náhuatl spread far beyond the original linguistic area. While at the time of the Aztec Triple Alliance, which was perceived as oppressive, no one liked to identify with them, the independence fighters of the early nineteenth century, in their search for historical models for their struggle against the Spaniards, liked to do so. Cuauhtémoc in particular offered himself as a model for a national idol through his willingness to die and his tragic end. Immediately after his imprisonment, he is said to have called on Cortés to kill him, but Cortés refused to do so by staging himself as magnanimous.[88] But then, in 1525, he had him killed for doubtable reasons.[89]

Thus today—with the exception of Tlaxcala—there is hardly a town in Mexico where at least one street or place is not dedicated to the last Aztec ruler Cuauhtémoc. Instead of seeing him as a defender of an exploitative, fearsome power, Cuauhtémoc became and still is seen as a freedom fighter against colonialism and imperialism, a kind of Mexican Ché Guevara. The national policy of remembrance with regard to the Aztec's heroic but doomed struggle is also reflected not only in an over-generalization of the Mexican remembrance of the Aztecs—with the exclusion of numerous other equally important Mexican indigenous peoples. The same is the case, for example, with the transfer of the Aztec symbol of the eagle on the cactus to the national flag since 1821 or the naming of Mexico's largest football stadium "Estadio Azteca" (87,000 seats, since 1966). In addition, the memory of Cuauhtémoc was also kept alive by the naming after him the central district (*demarcación territorial*) of México City including the historical centre, or the Mexican sailing training ship from 1982.[90] In 1887 a monument was consecrated to Cuauhtémoc in the capital of Mexico, his bust can also be seen at the Zócalo, the main square of the city, in front of the National Palace, and many other monuments to his memory can be found even in those Mexican cities with which the historic Cuauhtémoc had nothing to do at all, for example in the city Cuauhtémoc in Chihuahua, but also in Tijuana (Baja California), on the Avenida Cuauhtémoc in Veracruz, which runs like a locking bolt to the port (obviously meant here as patron saint for the strategic entrance gate to Mexico), or in Torreon (Cuahuila). The

[88] Cortés [1522] (1993): tercera relación, 427.

[89] Díaz del Castillo [ca. 1560-1584] (2005): cap. CLXXVII, 649. This fascinating chronicle is still a mystery today. Only when all his comrades were dead did Bernal write down his experiences—allegedly. It remains unclear where he was able to get all the information from and why Cortés never entrusted a command to this alert mind. Duverger (2015) even believes that none other than Cortés himself wrote the chronicle. Grunberg (2017), probably the best connoisseur of the conquistadors, vehemently rejects this thesis. Indeed, it seems that Duverger did not sufficiently evaluate the edition of Barbón Rodríguez, who also compiles a number of other sources on BDC. But the mystery remains.

[90] Previously, a Mexican destroyer (Fletcher class) had already borne the name “Cuauhtémoc” from 1970.

Latin American significance of this name, which radiates beyond the Estados Unidos de México, is also evident in Argentina (Guatimozín, Córdoba) and Brazil (Plaza Cuauhtémoc in Rio de Janeiro, with statue).[91]

The Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlán also caused much interest among historians, which can be hinted at in the bibliography cited here.[92] This is due not only to the actually exciting events in distant worlds, but above all to the fact that several conquistadors left reports, and in particular Cortés himself proved to be a capable author who also created a literary monument with his letters to Charles V (*Cartas de relación*). His reports, on the other hand, inspired other very capable authors who subsequently wrote a series of remarkable historiographical works on the downfall of Aztec domination: above all the Spanish humanist Francisco López de Gómara (1552: *Historia de la conquista de México*), who determined the narrative structure of the material to this day, and the alleged or actual conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1560-1584: *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*), which, despite the large time gap, is written incredibly vividly and excitingly, and which both have remarkable detailed knowledge that can actually only come from Cortés himself, much later William Hickling Prescott (1843: *History of the Conquest of Mexico*), who wrote the first "scientific" history of the material, but which is nevertheless very vivid. Also Indian historiography of very different kind has reacted to the event. On the one hand, in the mid-sixteenth century, the Tlaxcaltecs created a large-format picture story of the conquest with which they wanted to communicate their merits in the conquest of Mexico (not only the one of Tenochtitlán) on the side of the Spaniards (not only of Cortés) to the Spanish crown. And even the losers have not been completely mute. Obviously in the context of the Franciscan missionary school of Tlatelolco already from 1528 the *Annals of Tlatelolco* arose, which underline the importance of Tlatelolco in relation to Tenochtitlán. Finally, the works of the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún, based on interviews with Aztecs about their religion, culture and history, should be mentioned in this context. The resulting chapters are available in Náhuatl and Spanish. However, this is not to be misunderstood as a modern oral-history approach, but the materials thus obtained served as the basis for a Franciscan reinterpretation of Aztec history in the Joachite sense.[93]

Public interest in the history of the downfall of the Aztecs has remained high ever since. Although the number of professorships in Ancient American Studies and History of Hispanic America is decreasing not only in Germany and Europe, more or less well-known popular scientific works on the Aztecs, Cortés and the conquest of Mexico appear at regular intervals. Although the subject, which still contains long-lasting myths such as the

[91] See the list in the Spanish Wikipedia article on Cuauhtémoc.

[92] See in more detail. Hinz (2005): 635-780.

[93] Phelan (1956).

one of the "white gods", there is still no great Cortés film today.[94] But on the other hand there are at least several historical novels and comics.[95]

5 Conclusion

To sum up, the reasons for the downfall of the Aztec tribute empire can be summarised as follows:

First of all, the Aztec rule had clear weaknesses: it was based on violence and fear and gave little back to its subjects. Accordingly, it was hated. There was neither a unifying imperial idea, nor a strict central administration, a central street system, a common religion, a standing army, or other features for empires, but was essentially based on the tribute system that either affected or threatened everyone in central Mexico. The power of the Aztecs is therefore based almost exclusively on their military strength, which, however, the further their dominion expanded and the more potential enemies the Triple Alliance made of them, the weaker it became.

Another weakness of the Aztec rule was the rigid and strictly hierarchical society. At the moment when the political leadership failed for whatever reason, there were few forces in society to take the initiative.

In the specific case of the confrontation with the Spaniards, this leadership and in particular the *huey tlatoani* made a number of fatal mistakes. The main mistake might have been that Motecuhzoma clearly underestimated the threat from the Spaniards. That is the only way to explain why he let them capture him without resistance.

So while Motecuhzoma made mistakes, his opponent Cortés showed tenacity and great skill, especially in the military and diplomatic fields. On the part of current historians, Hugh Thomas in particular praises his good nerves, his personal commitment and his gift for improvisation during the war.[96] Despite everything mentioned above, the conquest of Tenochtitlán was by no means guaranteed success.

Another factor, often overestimated in older literature, was the superior technique of the Spaniards. The iron helmets and breastplates offered good protection, while the Indians of Mexico had little to oppose to iron cut and thrust weapons, firearms, crossbows, horses and fighting dogs in combination with warfare that was not about honour in duels.

Hardly to overestimate, on the other hand, was a completely unpredictable moment: the epidemics that considerably weakened Aztec society and the elite at the decisive moment. Even if exact figures are not available, the mortality rate was so high that the state temporarily failed, especially in late summer and autumn 1520, when the defeated Spaniards had to recover in Tlaxcala and then set about forging a deadly alliance against

[94] To name at least: *Captain from Castile*, Director: Henry King, USA, 141 Min., (1947).

[95] Prominent: Stucken 1918-1922 or Jean-Yves Mitton's comic series *Quetzalcóatl* (1998-2008).

[96] Thomas (2003), 78.

Tenochtitlán. Had the Aztecs still had the strength to conquer Veracruz after the battle of Otumba, the Spaniards under Cortés would probably have been lost.

And finally, the Aztecs lacked the decisive bit of luck in other situations because they were caught by the plague and had to deal with an especially dangerous group of conquistadors. The *Noche Triste* in particular was the moment when Cortés could have been killed or the Spaniards could have been rubbed out en masse.

As a general result of these observations, it could be said that in the question of what an empire was, not least of all, the kind of demise can be taken as a kind of acid test. In this sense, one should only speak of an empire if it has sufficient power resources to survive a military defeat, even if it loses a large army, and mobilize new forces. In the case of the Aztecs, their power was so weakened after the battle of Otumba (albeit in combination with the epidemic) that their domination suddenly ceased to exist. History knows similar cases in which states were destroyed by a single battle (e.g. the "Visigoth Empire" in 711). Similarly, in these cases one should not speak of "empires".

6 Postscript

This article was written in 2019, but the years 2019-2021 marked the 500th anniversary of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, and this did not go unnoticed in the reception. In view of the prevailing critical discussions of colonialism, the topic received only cautious attention outside Spain and Mexico.[97] But here, too, political rifts opened up: The Mexican President Andrés Manuel López-Obrador repeatedly demanded an official apology for the conquista from both the Spanish king and the pope. This has not yet been forthcoming, but the issue is not over. In 2021, Mexico even decided to remove the last names of conquistadors from street names—and even the famous "Arbol de la Noche Triste" (Tree of the Sad Night) will now officially be called "Arbol de la Noche Victoriosa" (Tree of the Victorious Night).[98] The Mexican government is thus pretending to be the direct and legitimate heir of the Mexica.

Meanwhile, researchers agree that differentiated perspectives are appropriate, rather than glorifying or condemning. The most important new publications are added to the bibliography.

[97] A list of historical conferences, also the one in Stuttgart that was organized by the author, Xavier-López-Medellín and other colleagues, can be found here: http://www.medellinhistoria.com/blog_1/realizaciones_nacionales_e_internacionales_con_motivo_del_v_centenario_de_la_llegada_de_cortes_a_mexico__186 (checked 27.05.2021) Hinz and López-Medellin (2021).

[98] Alejo Santiago, Jesús y Leticia Sánchez Medel. “Expertos reaccionan a cambio de nombre del Árbol de la Noche Triste y Puente de Alvarado.” Milenio, 10 de marzo, (2021). https://www.milenio.com/cultura/cambio-nombre-arbol-noche-triste-genera-reacciones.

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Part V

Middle Age and Modern History

The Fall of the Napoleonic Empire

Michael Broers

At the outset, an explanation is needed for the use of the term 'hegemony' alongside that of 'empire' in this essay. There was a Napoleonic empire, 'proper', which at its height in 1811 consisted of 130 departments ruled directly from Paris, containing a population of approximately 44 million inhabitants. This embraced, at its height, all of France and the Low Countries, the left bank of the Rhine, most of north-western Italy, and more briefly, modern Catalonia, Croatia, Slovenia and the North Sea coast of Germany. However, beyond this lay the 'satellite kingdoms of Napoleon's siblings: Italy (comprising Lombardy, Venice, Modena and the modern Emilia-Romana) under himself, with Eugene de Beauharnais as his permanent Vicreoy; Naples, first under his brother, Joseph, and then, after 1808, under his sister Caroline and her husband, Murat; Westphalia, under his youngest brother, Jerome; and—more ephemerally—Spain, under Joseph; that of Holland, under his brother Louis, was abolished in 1810 and incorporated into the Empire. There were also the allied states, principally the sixteen states of the Confederation of the Rhine under their own rulers (which included Westphalia), the *Mittelstaaten*. The Helevtic Confderation (Switzerland) and Denmark were also important, longstanding allies, but it was the *Mittelstaaten* that formed so vital a resource for Napoleon. Thus, the term 'hegemony' possesses an important relevance for an understating of the nature of Napoleonic Europe, particularly in questions of diplomatic relations. Its deployment here is deliberate, and used in the interests of precision.

Incontrovertibly, the First Napoleonic Empire and the entire French hegemony collapsed rapidly and comprehensively as a result of a string of crushing military defeats and

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the diplomatic realignments concomitant on them. After his defeat in Russia in 1812, the process of disintegration, while by no means inevitable, is still clearly discernible. It can be traced and analysed with benefit of historical hindsight, and was seen as feasible by all the contemporary protagonists; it became the focus of the military and diplomatic objectives of the partners of the Fifth Coalition, and as imperative in the increasingly desperate efforts of Napoleon to check and then reverse the tide of events. That is, there is a clear process at work and, if not determinist, then certainly relentlessly at work in the period 1812–1814. These emphatic, empirical historical realities must, per force, mark the beginning of any analysis of the end of Napoleonic hegemony in Europe.

This places the historian in the interesting position of working backwards from the military-diplomatic events of the 'the fall', to a series of enquiries into the possibilities of deeper, more structural contributing factors to these events. They are of two essential kinds: Firstly, those which gave rise to Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812; that is, those immediate factors which led to the definitive start of the process of collapse, factors which, arguably, can stretch far back into the history of Napoleonic expansion. Second, are aspects of the Napoleonic regime which may, or may not, have made it prone to self-destruction, whether imbedded in its fundamental character, or which it developed over the short course of its existence. This reverses utterly the Braulelian logic of history, while still paying tribute to it, and makes of the undertaking something of a justification of Nietzsche's cutting insight, that 'Historians are like crabs—they walk backwards until they think backwards.'

This is not to say that these two types of structural factors are easily separable from each of the major immediate or systemic elements involved in the process of analysis. They cannot always be disentangled, nor should they be. Nevertheless, the heritage of the contemporary historian of Napoleonic Europe leads to a sequence of themes which have been traced by historiography, and need to be followed, even with the end of—relatively—discrediting some of them or, at least, assigning them different positions, privileging some over others in a new causal hierarchy. In order to incorporate the major historiographical discourses within a process of analysis that works backwards from a clear historical watershed, this essay opens with that watershed: the military and diplomatic process of 1812–1814, then examines the reasons behind Napoleon's invasion of Russia which triggered the process by looking at those aspects of the Napoleonic state and the landscape of international relations that led to war in1812. It then examines the internal geo-political character of Napoleon's hegemony, examining this through the concept of imperial 'over-stretch', positing the existence of an 'inner' and 'outer' empire in this context.[1] It then examines the extent of internal opposition to the regime and its potential—or lack of it—to destabilise it, both in the long term and specifically in the circumstances of the existential crises of 1812–1814. Finally, in the manner of a provisional conclusion, it will try to assess the influence of Napoleon's own character on the collapse of his hegemony, which has

[1] Broers (2001): 135-154.

proved so powerful an element in its historiography. Napoleon was an inveterate risk-taker. This is one of those subjective assertions that can be factually established, and need not be laboured, although it is more readily applicable to his military than his political career. He was deeply aware of the particular, practical risks he was running in trying to invade Russia in 1812, and spent a staggering amount of time planning how to cope with the dangers involved and trying to turn them to his advantage.

At a more structural level, and in the illuminating context of comparative imperial history help reveal the fundamental vulnerabilities of the Napoleonic hegemony, which were implicit in its very form. Its tangled core of imperial departments, satellite kingdoms and allied states complexities notwithstanding, Napoleon's hegemony were typical of a territorially contiguous, relatively compact imperial entity. Its frontiers had become more extended in the years 1810–1811, as he annexed long tracts of the European coastline in an effort to enforce his blockade against Britain, and after he had made what he, himself soon admitted was a badly judged attempt to incorporate the Iberian peninsula, beginning in 1808. Nevertheless, his hegemony remained contiguous; it had no significant overseas territories after the loss of Saint Domingue in 1804, and no sprawling, under developed hinterlands. This made it significantly different from its two immediate rivals, Britain and Russia. As early as 1805, following their comprehensive military defeat at Austerlitz, the Russians used the vastness of their land empire simply to evade further losses to Napoleon, withdrawing into their interior, as they did, again, in 1807. In each case, particularly in 1807, they did so with a large, serviceable army still intact. It was the recognition of exactly this impasse which drove Napoleon to the conference table with Tsar Alexander I at Tilsit, in 1807. Even following his stunning victory over the Russians at Friedland that spring, Napoleon still had to watch helplessly as the Russians withdrew in good order, beyond his ability to pursue them. It was equally impossible for Napoleon to strike at the British imperial metropole—he could not cross the Channel, given British naval power—to say nothing to weakening its colonial possessions, on which the British drew increasingly for raw materials and subsistence products, as the wars progressed and Napoleon's blockade showed intermittent signs of effectiveness. After several almost farcical attempts to establish toeholds on the European mainland, by 1809 the British managed to expel the French first from Portugal, and then from Galicia, the north-western most region of Spain. They remained penned in here until the collapse which followed the Russian campaign, but they were able to retain their hold because of their ability to supply their armies there by sea. Likewise, the British were able to distort and frustrate Napoleon's efforts at blockade through the imposing power of the Royal Navy, a juggernaut with over 200 warships in European waters at its peak. It was able to harass the French along the Spanish, Italian and Adriatic coasts at will, even if larger scale attempts at amphibious invasions—such as the attempted from Sicily and the Balearic islands in 1809 ended in failure.

The threat of Russia was very different. In 1807, the Russian army had proved a match for the French at Eylau, if not at Friedland, and the defensive possibilities of its vast hinterland were made very clear to Napoleon. This rivalry opposed two land empires and societies of very different kinds, and a different set of imperial paradigms come into focus.

The Russian imperial core was positioned very differently from Napoleon's. The region Timothy Snyder has called the 'blood lands'[2]—modern Belarus and Lithuania—is an agriculturally poor, sparsely inhabited buffer zone between the European peninsula and the red earth region of Great Russia, a natural barrier any invaders from the west crossed at their peril. By contrast, Napoleon's imperial core had actually shifted eastwards by 1812, and was very vulnerable from the east, if breached in sufficient force.

As long as Napoleon maintained military preponderance in his hegemony—even where his grip on the coasts was relatively weak—his position was secure. However, the fundamental nature of this hegemony made it vulnerable should that preponderance falter seriously. This is a common potential weakness in land empires of this kind. If assailed successfully on one frontier, sufficiently to weaken control on others, then its core becomes threatened on all sides, with rapidity. The fate of the Third Reich is a salient case in point, as is that of the Ottoman Empire in World War One or, albeit in almost unique circumstances, that of the Aztec Empire. This last example, for all its singularity in most respects, also offers an example of the risks to a compact land empire when external invasion triggers the collapse of peripheral alliances, and their conversion into offensive threats against the imperial metropole. This was the intrinsic precipice Napoleon's power was perched upon. It was hardly unique to polities of this kind. June Burbank and Fred Cooper have expressed this best:

The most powerful constraint on making a new unipolar power was other empires: the British and Russian empires were crucial to defeating, over a century apart, the imperial plans of Napoleon and Hitler.[3]

As he felt exactly these threats building around him, with Russia to his east and Britain to his south and northwest, by 1811 he chose take punitive action, to seize the initiative.

1 The Existential Crisis: 1812–1814

The military damage done to the Napoleonic regime by the 1812 campaign is obvious in its magnitude. Of the over 650,000 troops of the *Grande Armée* that invaded Russia in the spring of 1812, barely 93,000 returned; the rear guard numbered only about 13,000, half of whom were unfit for service.[4] These staggering figures beg two penetrating questions, over which current historiography has begun to reach consensus: What propelled Napoleon to invade Russia, in the first instance? Secondly, how did he manage to continue the war for as long as he did, following such a crushing defeat? The answers, however incomplete as they must be, open as many windows on the strengths of his regime as they do its weaknesses, and point as much to the strategic dangers inherent in compact land empires, as to the

[2] Synder (2010).

[3] Burbank and Cooper (2010): 15.

[4] Chandler (1967): 582.

particular circumstances of the years after 1812 and Napoleon's failure to stem the Allied tide through either military victory or diplomacy.

An older, less grounded historiography has often alluded to Napoleon's insatiable thirst for conquest, and the irreversible needs of his vast military machine, as the real forces propelling his decision to invade Russia. This has found its most sophisticated exponent in the American diplomatic historian, Paul W. Schroeder, who reduces the collapse of 1812 thus: 'Napoleon did what he did because he was Napoleon' and that he 'had no underlying purpose at all.' Schroeder contended that even to place the Napoleonic empire in the context of wider imperial history is to denature the historical debate, for it has no viable historical comparison.[5] These premises have found their supporters, particularly in Anglo-Saxon historiography that even on occasion revives the theory that Napoleon was bent on a war of conquest and annexation in Russia.[6] The 'war of conquest' theory has been thoroughly discredited by the research of military historians who have shown that the campaign was meant as a punitive strike, planned to last only three weeks. Napoleon was working to his usual strategy of bringing the Russians to one, large engagement involving the bulk of their army and inflicting a decisive defeat upon them. (In fact, the first major battle between the main armies took place at Smolensk on 16-18 August, about four days ahead of schedule. It was not decisive because the Russians made a strategic withdrawal to keep their forces intact.) The recent research of Dominic Lieven has also done much to disprove the idea that 1812 was a war of conquest.[7] Taken together, these contributions show that Napoleon emphatically rebuffed all entreaties from the Lithuanian and Belarussian elites to incorporate them into the imperial system. In the light of this, it is implausible to incorporate the 1812 campaign into any wider concept of 'imperial over stretch' or an irrational notion of world conquest. Close examination of Russian policy has shown that Napoleon could not count on any lasting entente with Russia. Tsar Alexander did not trust Napoleon and made this clear to his advisors as early as 1808, before their second summit at Erfurt. This was not rooted in any fear that Napoleon wanted to conquer Russia, but in his resurrection of a proto-Polish state, the Duchy of Warsaw. This embedded a potentially hostile Polish challenge to the stability of his western provinces, made all the more threatening by Napoleon's revival of Polish militarism on a huge scale, although he actually used the bulk of these forces in Spain between 1808 and 1812.[8] It was the intractable threat of the Duchy of Warsaw which saw Alexander briefly consider an offensive war against Napoleon in 1811. Russia was far from a passive player in the growing crisis of 1812, and Napoleon's decision to accede to Polish hopes for a measure of national revival made this so, even if his own intentions were to increase his military resources in Spain, not against Russia. The invasion had two clear goals: to eliminate the

[5] Schroeder (1994): 393-94.

[6] Dwyer (2013), Esdaile (2007) for the most recent.

[7] Lieven (2009).

[8] Czubaty (2016): 79-94.

last formidable land army capable of challenging Napoleon's military supremacy in Europe, which would allow him to concentrate all his resources against Britain, and to force Russia back into the Blockade, which it had effectively left early in 1811. That is, the invasion of Russia was but one—if a vital—aspect of Napoleon's struggle with Britain.

Britain was regarded generally, and not just by Napoleon, as an implacable, almost inevitable rival and threat to France, a 'given' he inherited from both the ancien regime and the revolutionary governments of the 1790s. British naval power had already demonstrated that any ambitions France still harboured for rebuilding its overseas empire after its shattering defeat in the Seven Years' War in the mid-eighteenth century were illusory, especially after the overwhelming British naval victory at Trafalgar in October, 1805. (Napoleon had only been able to launch his ill-fated expedition to retake Saint Domingue by the brief peace with Britain made at Amiens in 1801. When war resumed, the window of unhindered Atlantic passage closed firmly.) The context of a wider imperial history, denied by Schroeder, appears axiomatic when the Anglo-French rivalry is made central to the almost perpetual conflict in which the Napoleonic regime was engaged, and must seriously undermine his assertion that Napoleon had no purpose: Napoleon's stood in a long line of French regimes entangled in an imperial rivalry which contemporaries, themselves, readily compared to that of Rome and Carthage. The anthropologist, Marshal Sahlins, has recently analysed this kind of rivalry in the seemingly incongruous contexts of nineteenth century Fiji and the Peloponesian war:

Comparison with Fiji will suggest that the contrast of Spartan autarchy with Athenian enterprise is not merely structurally grounded but historically connected...Sparta and Athens evolve(d) against one another as cultural antitypes.[9]

This anthropological trope extends to the self-images of Britain and France, even if the French, certainly, preferred to cast themselves as Rome against Carthage for obvious reasons, rather than as Sparta against Athens. It can find very empirical, historical applications in the imperial rivalry between Britain and the Napoleonic empire.

Until 1812, the British and Napoleon had 'harried' each other along the southern coasts of Europe. The war in Spain was increasingly unpopular in France, and it bled causalities on a regular basis, if not on a massive scale. British sea power made their grip on western Iberia powerful, and several concerted efforts to dislodge them by good French armies ended in failure. Nevertheless, in the period 1810-1812, there is strong evidence that the French were winning the war against the guerrillas, and even building promising bases of support among the local population in parts of Spain. Weariness of general disorder and growing fear of a patriotic resistance that was degenerating into plain banditry, ensured that the Iberian front was unlikely to threaten Napoleon's hegemony on its own. Equally, British sea power made certain that it was intractable. Even the Russian campaign did not change this in the first instance. The withdrawal of good French troops in 1812 incited Wellington to attempt an invasion of northern Spain, but he was quickly repulsed. Once

[9] Sahlins (2004): 46.

massive troop withdrawals were made early in 1813, to make good the losses of the Russian campaign, the situation changed utterly, however, and the French were swept from Spain with relative rapidity. Napoleon recognised the seriousness of the collapse of Spain and the British advance by his futile attempt to 'restore' Ferdinand VII, releasing him from his French exile, in the hopes of undercutting the British advance. Wellington invaded France, itself, in the last weeks of 1813. This is the point when the Napoleonic empire really entered into a two-front war, and it was still on a small scale. (Soult's forces actually proved capable of checking Wellington's advance on their own, once the fighting moved into southern France.) Britain's most effective contribution to the collapse of Napoleonic hegemony came in an indirect manner, more in keeping with its 'Carthaginian' stereotype.

Napoleon had suffered a blow in Russia that, prima facia, should have ended his hegemony there and then, but a closer examination of the situation in the winter of 1812-1813 reveals considerable weaknesses among his enemies, and also the extent of the impressive resources he could still draw upon. The Russians, themselves, had been badly mauled by Napoleon, and Alexander did not feel confident about converting a successful—if costly—defensive strategy into what might prove a prolonged war in central and western Europe, carrying the fighting into regions where Napoleon had defeated him in the past. Austria was in an even more difficult position. Napoleon has often been criticised with good reason, for his disjointed policy towards the Habsburgs after his victory over them in 1809. His then foreign minister, Talleyrand, eventually turned on him (if secretly) because of his virtual emasculation of Austrian military and financial resources after 1809, and his failure to rebuild an alliance with them. He was proved partially correct when Napoleon forced Austria into the war of 1812, knowing their participation was grudging and their capabilities were weakened by his own policies. However, in the changed circumstances of early 1813, these very weaknesses made the Habsburgs cautious about turning on even so badly wounded a Napoleon. All this bought him time to rebuild.

The tide was turned, in terms of Russian and Austrian willingness to carry on the fight, by the realisation of Napoleon's worst nightmare: a firm Anglo-Russian alliance. French governments from the outset of the wars in 1792 had raved about the ubiquitous poison of 'Pitt's gold', British financial subsidies, which enticed and propelled the Russians, Austrians and Prussians into ever more wars against them. In reality, 'Pitt's gold' seldom if ever materialised in sufficient quantities to help the continental powers, and actually led to considerable distrust and bitterness between them and the British. No financial help reached either the Russians or the Austrians in 1805, and lack of the promised aid in 1807 had left Alexander suspicious and embittered. In 1809, the British first encouraged the Austrians into war, but then reacted coolly to Vienna's requests for financial help. Although Canning eventually conjured one million pounds through his own efforts, in dribs and drabs, no regular subsidy ever transpired.[10] At least in 1812, the British were frank with Alexander. In May, 1812, Richard Wellesley set out his arguments clearly in

[10] Schroeder (1994): 358-59.

cabinet that it would be wrong to incite Russia to oppose Napoleon, as Russia would be 'encouraged by them to make demands of money and armies which we could not satisfy...it is certain we can give Russia no money, and it is probable that it will not be in our power to give her military assistance...Aid may perhaps be afforded...by supplies and stores.' [11] Arms and supplies were forthcoming—101,000 rifles arrived from Britain[12]—50,000 of which came before the outbreak of war[13]—but Wellesley was heeded. Alexander did not even ask.[14] Once the Russians had proved themselves in 1812, this changed, and the British finally did commit impressive financial resources to help Alexander rebuild his forces quickly, with the solid assurance that this support would increase and continue, as the new war took shape. In April, 1813. two million pounds were made immediately available to the allies, to be divided between Russia and Prussia on condition that none of the three powers made a separate peace with Napoleon. Rather more reluctantly, Britain continued this support, paying Prussia and Russia £2,500,000 each in 1814 and 1815, directly and in full.[15]

Napoleon's need to rebuild his own forces led him to commit a fatal miscalculation which compounded this new lethal combination of British financial resources and Russian military power. In an effort to buy time, and most of all to rebuild his cavalry which had been decimated in Russia, Napoleon asked for and got an armistice for two months in June 1813. This allowed the Russians to overcome their considerable logistical problems, for their decimation of the *Grande Armée* had done nothing to improve their poor roads. It gave them ample time to move large, fresh troop concentrations into central Europe, and for British aid to reach them. That army would remain in Europe for some time to come, and shift the military—and subsequently, the diplomatic—balance definitively against Napoleon. This development, coupled with his own weaknesses, actually made Francis I of Austria hold back from committing to the new coalition. The prospect of so powerful a Russian army in central Europe, at this point, might have been more dangerous to the Austrians than Napoleon, who had no significant designs on their territory. Russia and the Habsburgs, by contrast, had longstanding rivalries in the Balkans. There was no guarantee at this point that the coalition against Napoleon would hold together, particularly if he inflicted a heavy military defeat upon the allies. There was a likelihood during the armistice of summer, 1813, that Napoleon and Alexander might come to a separate peace, so frustrated was Alexander with his Prussia allies.[16] The resurgence of French military power over the summer of 1813 was remarkable in the circumstances. Napoleon managed to assemble about 200,000 men in Germany, most of them raw French recruits—his elite

[11] Cited in Muir (1996): 185.
[12] Lieven (2009): 90.
[13] Rey (2012): 72.
[14] Muir (1996): 228.
[15] Muir (1996): 253-54.
[16] Siemann (2016): 394.

units having been almost obliterated in Russia—who lacked training and stamina. His cavalry was still a shadow of itself and, more to the point, of that of the allies. The best troops in his ranks were now veterans withdrawn from Spain in vast numbers, which in turn opened the way, at last, for Wellington to sweep across northern Spain to the Pyrenees and beyond. Nevertheless, adapting his battlefield tactics to the limitations of his troops, Napoleon had checked the allies in all his major engagements in early 1813. He was only finally and roundly defeated at the three-day battle of Leipzig in October, 1813, and then only by the narrowest of margins. His losses were not much greater than those of the allies, but the Russians, in particular, found it easier to replenish their ranks than could Napoleon.[17]

The key to holding the coalition together—to retaining the lethal combination of Russian men and British money—was the work of the Austrian diplomat, Metternich. Recent research by the British historian Munro Price and, above all, by Wolfram Siemann in his monumental biography of Metternich have completely rewritten this crucial phase of the end of the Napoleonic empire.[18] Metternich carefully steered Francis towards active participation in the coalition, for Francis discerned a clear difference between distancing himself from Napoleon and joining in the fighting. Above all, he held the balance between Alexander's ambitions and his own monarch's dread of them, allaying their respective fears.[19] A close analysis of his correspondence reveals Metternich's determination to defeat Napoleon, even if his aspirations did not go as far as his total destruction. His initial positioning of himself as a mediator between Napoleon and Alexander was a careful policy of buying time for Austrian rearmament and winning over Francis, research which seriously undermines Schroeder's thesis, that entry into the coalition in August represented the failure of Metternich's policy.[20] Metternich remained with the allied headquarters from Leipzig onwards, close to the action, and emerged as the most consistently committed leader to the coalition. Financial support still had to be wrung from Britain—so often seen as the architect of victory—and Alexander's shifting attitude to Napoleon was a fear to all, particularly as his military power made him the lynchpin of any real victory. At this stage, diplomacy became the pivot of the war effort. This is not to say Napoleon was closed to negotiation. Metternich involved him in a series of talks, even after Leipzig, but in the full knowledge that his terms, which involved continuing his control over what he saw as the core of his empire in northern Italy, western Germany and the Low Countries, were unacceptable to one or other of the allies.[21]

Metternich's most decisive diplomatic achievement was in dismantling the key component of that inner empire, by breaking Napoleon's hold on the princes of the Confederation

[17] Gates (1997): 233-35.

[18] Price (2014), Siemann (2016).

[19] Siemann (2016): 377, 405.

[20] Siemann (2016): 378, Schroeder (1994): 461.

[21] Price (2014): 163-69.

of the Rhine. Napoleon's greatest achievement as an 'empire builder'—or, more precisely, an hegemonic master—was made without a shot fired. Beginning even before the Peace of Amines in 1802, he had won over the rulers of most of the *Mittelstaaten*, a task made all the easier in 1805 when Austria made grossly obvious its long-standing ambitions to annex Bavaria; the relationship was solidified after the wars of 1805 and 1806, as Napoleon vastly increased their states with the territories of the mediatised princes, and enhanced their standing by recognising their full sovereignty as independent states after Francis abolished the Holy Roman Empire. In the autumn of 1813, Metternich undid this by the same means Napoleon had created it. Bavaria, the largest of the Confederation states and Napoleon's oldest ally, deserted him just before Leipzig. Metternich agreed to recognise its existing borders and renounced all Austrian ambitions over it. It was a personal triumph, won at the cost of considerable unpopularity at home. When this became known at Leipzig, the Saxon and Württemberger troops on the field changed sides; the king of Württemberg soon followed suit; the king of Saxony did not, was captured on the field and his country put under allied military rule. The other princes took the carrot from Metternich, to avoid Alexander's stick. By 7 November, the Confederation was no more. This cut the ground from under Napoleon on two levels: he was now deprived of the major resources of the Confederation, his financial and military power now gravely damaged in the long run. Combined with this, the mass defections, that of Bavaria especially, was literally—geographically—a stab in the back. Napoleon now had no hope of fighting on in Germany, and had to race his exhausted troops across the Rhine, back into France, to avoid being caught in the rear by the Bavarians (although, in fact, they were easily enough swept aside at Hanau, on 30 October).

The collapse of his hegemony in Germany, coupled with the treason of Murat and Caroline which ensured his eventual defeat in Italy, changed the fundamental character of the war. Napoleon's empire, not just his wider hegemony, was gone, and final campaign of 1814, like the virtual irrelevance of the 100 Days, became a war of French national defence. The Napoleonic empire had fallen; Napoleonic France would follow suit, but it has no further relevance in an imperial context. Save in one respect: Napoleon's obduracy over making peace, and in particular, his refusal to accept allied terms at Chatillon in February, 1814—which would have left him in power within the pre-war borders of 1792—has usually been attributed to his refusal concede defeat, his (correct) sense that the allies were at odds with each other and might be divided, and a patriotic commitment to retaining the 'natural frontiers' declared by the revolutionaries. Munro Price places particular emphasis on this last point.[22] All these factors were doubtlessly important, but Napoleon had concrete reasons for seeking to retain his 'inner empire', outside France proper, if at all possible. These territories had become intrinsic to the wellbeing of France, itself. His attitude to their retention fed his intransigence and soon led to a coup against him at the apex of the regime, the creation of a rival provisional government in Paris, and the desertion of a large

[22] Price (2014): 167.

part of his army and administration, now able to cease hostilities without the ignominy of surrender. Above all, it gave the allies—themselves divided about what sort of regime or, indeed, who, should succeed Napoleon—people to negotiate with.[23] The enduring issue of imperial hegemony in 1814 opens the way to an exploration of longer term systemic weaknesses in the Napoleonic hegemony, and an analysis of their relative importance to its final collapse.

2 Systemic Weaknesses: Their Relative Potential for Imperial Implosion

In examining all the potential weaknesses which existed in Napoleonic Europe, the hard historical fact remains that they did not bring the regime down. That required a military catastrophe of unprecedented magnitude in Russia in 1812, which made the process of defeat feasible, and it still took the costly efforts of a Pan-European coalition to bring to fulfilment. If further proof were needed of this, it is found in the personal evolution of Clemens von Metternich who, after close observation as Austrian ambassador to Paris, strongly opposed war with Napoleon in 1808-09, firmly believing that even a war on two fronts could not bring him down.[24] After Russia, his attitude and policies changed, utterly. It was only in these vastly altered circumstances that potential structural weaknesses could influence the course of events, but they could not be left unaddressed by Napoleon. The major factors which all contemporaries—Napoleon, above all—recognised as flaws within Napoleonic Europe, contributed to his decision to invade Russia in the first place, just as they strengthened his obstinate refusal to make peace in 1814. This would seem to be the context in which they need to be examined, rather than that of conjecture as to how they might have impacted on a hypothetical future.

2.1 'Over Stretch' and the Imperial Core: Inner and Outer Empires, Their Strengths and Liabilities

June Burbank and Fred Cooper, in their recent monumental study of empire, get directly to the heart of imperial ambition: 'The political logic of enrichment through expansion has produced empires around the globe as a major form of power...The enticements of subordination and enrichment kept empires in motion.'[25] David Bell sees this as the driving

[23] The important work of Pierre Serna has done much to illuminate this last phase of the regime, the nature of the coup, and the pivotal role of the provisional government: Serna (2005): 150-59.

[24] Siemann (2016): 282-83.

[25] Burbank and Cooper (2010): 10, 11.

force behind Napoleonic expansion, and the root of an 'over-stretch' that was imposible to sustain:

No conqueror could have easily kept control over such vast stretches of land, and the nature of Napoleonic imperialism made the task even more difficult...(A)s the scope of the war grew, Napoleon needed new lands to provide him with revenues and, increasingly, conscripts to feed his ever-famished military machine.[26]

In fact, these 'enticements' played a relatively minor role in the actual expansion of Napoleonic power, although as the economic and military worth of certain parts of his hegemony became clearer to him, the need to retain them thwarted all attempts to broker peace during the final crisis of the empire. 'Enticement' and the need for subordination came after conquest. Instead, Napoleonic expansion came in two phases: the first consolidated the gains of the 1790s and extended them only partially. These territories, in the main, became the 'inner empire', and by about 1810, it was becoming clear that the imperial axis had already shifted from a predominantly French base, to one centred on the alluvial corridor formed by the Rhine, Saone and Rhone, with important branches along the Main and, especially, the Po. In his fraught but almost perpetual attempts to bargain with the allies in 1813, Napoleon was utterly intransigent over yielding Belgium, northern Italy or most of those parts of western Germany 'in his gift': the left bank of the Rhine, the non-Prussian parts of Westphalia, the Grand Duchy of Berg. They had become integral to the French economy. The prosperity of Lyon, the rebellious second city of France, was built on a very 'uncommon market' of the raw silk produced in northern Italy which fuelled its looms at low tariffs. Grain from western Germany and the Po valley had proved crucial in staving off real famine in France during the bad harvests of 1810 and 1811. Belgium had become the major supplier of coal and iron to France, and to its armies, in particular.[27] All these regions provided conscripts on an almost industrial scale. They were more obedient and more easily governed than most of western or southern France. It would be impossible to argue for any danger of 'imperial over-stretch' within these confines. This is what made them such an impediment to peace.

The second phase of expansion began in 1807, as a specific response to the need to enforce the anti-British blockade, and changed profoundly the shape of the empire, proper, and the Napoleonic hegemony as a whole. There is a significant historiography which dates the decline of the empire from this point, based on the premise that because the blockade was ultimately unworkable, and that his attempts to enforce it were sapping Napoleon's power. These assertions are not cast-iron. Napoleon ruined the Atlantic ports of his empire—French and 'imperial' alike—and their hinterlands. He was aware of this, and thought the cost worth paying if it brought Britain to heal. This is where Schroeder's thesis that Napoleon 'was at war with his own empire'[28] is at its strongest. This cannot in any

[26] Bell (2007): 267.

[27] On Belgium: Grab (2003): 81. On he grains supply: Cobb (1972).

[28] Schroeder (1994): 398-402.

sense be regarded as a healthy basis upon which to build a stable polity, yet it should not assume that the hatred and disorder—mainly in terms of smuggling, brigandage and economic ruin—were of a magnitude to threaten the security of the regime, for they were not. Prima facia, the empire, proper, showed many geographical signs of 'over-stretch', a concept prevalent in Paul Kennedy's analysis of the decline of great powers, which has influenced theories of imperial decline since Gibbon.[29] When and where Napoleon expanded to tighten the blockade, he did so by direct annexation, not through his siblings or any other intermediary. However, Napoleon showed himself more than prepared to shed most of these departments in 1813,[30] making it clear that this phase of imperial expansion was only tactical—driven solely by the blockade—and so readily reversible. Indeed, the Illyrian provinces, although part of this strategy, were always seen as a bargaining chip with Austria, to be exchanged for Galicia, so to expand the Duchy of Warsaw.

This is not to say Napoleon's willingness to cede these territories under pressure was done with a sense of alacrity. There is an important distinction to be made between the coastal territories acquired solely for tactical reasons, and the inland areas of central Germany and Poland. These regions had quickly assumed important roles in the Napoleonic scheme of things, if in very different ways from the lands of the inner empire. Their value to the regime was purely military: Germany always garrisoned huge numbers of French troops who were not in combat. It was a huge 'holding area' and place of rest and relaxation for hundreds of thousands of imperial soldiers, and essential to sparing France the expense of the largest army in the world. These, together with the Veneto, were also the lands of the Napoleonic 'spoils system', the location of the *majorats* and *dotations*. The former were considerable grants of revenue drawn from estates ear-marked for high ranking officers and other officials, usually made hereditary in families; the latter were more numerous and smaller in scale, awarded in the main to soldiers of the Imperial Guard. It is impossible to know how the loss of these revenues would have impacted on the loyalty to the regime of their holders or their families, but there is no evidence that the officer corps turned on Napoleon after their loss. It is probable, but yet to be proved through research, that after the decimation of the Guard in Russia, the majority of people who lost important income from the *dotations* were widows and orphans, and so powerless whatever their feelings. There was a very particular military blow to the regime when these lands were first lost and then when the claim to them renounced in the negotiations of 1813. The great stud farms of Prussia and Poland fell into Napoleon's hands in 1806-07, and enabled him to forge a cavalry which was more than a match for the Russians. These horses were almost entirely lost in 1812, and could not now be replaced with anything of the same quality. Over-stretch into these untenable regions had quickly created a very specific form of dependence, and the military collapse of 1813-14 was deeply influenced by it. It is a

[29] Kennedy (1987).

[30] Price (2014): 163-65.

reasonable assumption that Napoleon's military capabilities would have been forever compromised without them, even it, his greatest military victories had been won before he acquired them.

The continuing importance to Napoleonic imperial power of Spain until the bitter end and, even more, of the Duchy of Warsaw, point to the real danger of 'over-stretch' for the Napoleonic hegemony. Both these regions brought him into direct conflict with the rival empires of Britain and Russia, in the case of Spain, almost by chance; in that of Russia, through a desire less to threaten Alexander, than the Habsburgs. Spain represents perhaps the only case of 'the enticement of subordination and enrichment' playing a dominant role in Napoleonic expansion. Napoleon invaded Spain in a moment of rare hubris, and soon regretted it, but he was convinced—principally by the yet more delusional Talleyrand—that Spain was a far wealthier country than, in reality, it was. Talleyrand easily convinced Napoleon that its acquisition would lead to its Latin American empire falling into French hands. These illusions were soon replaced by the grim reality of containing the Anglo-Portuguese and dislodging them if possible, and protecting Joseph from internal rebellion. Yet, even Spain—and its ruler, his brother Joseph—were ultimately expendable in the circumstances of 1813. The case of the Duchy of Warsaw was one of much more reluctant expansion, in the first instance, but one that brought Napoleon enrichment in the form of tens of thousands of excellent troops which, like those of the kingdom of Italy, had become an integral part of the war effort in Spain, and a largely loyal local elite, a loyalty which proved decisive in 1811, when it thwarted Alexander's hopes to launch an offensive war against Napoleon based on a Polish rising against him. In both cases, however, it led Napoleon into tensions with his rivals. In Spain, it erupted into a costly, unwinnable war, even if the threat could be contained until 1812. Poland was more serious. It was the critical bar to entente for Alexander. It is over Poland that the flaws in Napoleon's expansionism and his overarching policy of the anti-British blockade come together in a lethal cocktail. This convergence made the nightmare of an Anglo-Russian alliance a reality and led to the disaster of 1812. Paul Schroeder has seen in this a natural, organic evolution of 'an imperial venture that never went wrong, but was always wrong.' For Schroeder, Napoleon's hegemony never possessed the resources necessary to defeat his rival empires.[31] This seems true in the case of Britain, yet Britain lacked the military power to challenge Napoleon until it was ready to bankroll a Russia which had already badly dented it. The real problem came from the distrust Alexander felt for Napoleon. He had always disliked him, but was driven by domestic pressures to abandon the blockade, and into a state of permanent anxiety by the very existence of the Duchy of Warsaw, which he interpreted as a territorial threat to Russia. This is where the concept of 'over-stretch' has a major part to play in creating serious weaknesses in the Napoleonic hegemony. If there is a fatal flaw on its frontiers, replete with catastrophic consequences, it was Poland.

[31] Schroeder (1994):307.

This begs yet another question, in terms of the increasing vulnerability of Napoleon's hegemony. Although most historiographical focus has been on the blockade and coastal expansion, the aspect of 'over-stretch' that most preoccupied contemporaries was that the victories over Prussia and Russia in 1806-07 had brought the French into a new, different, but longstanding, conflict zone in central Europe, from which Napoleon did not attempt to extract himself. Talleyrand counselled against a Russian alliance, pointing to Russia's history of aggressive western expansion over the previous two centuries, yet his proposed alternative of an Austrian alliance was equally fraught with potential dangers: Too close, and too reciprocal, a relationship with Austria would have dragged Napoleon into their Balkan rivalries with Russia and, worse, the Ottomans, all the while bolstering up a weaker partner in the manner of the Germans a century later. Austria had also shown itself susceptible to entreaties from the British on more than one occasion. Above all, and a factor perhaps not given the scope it merits in much historiography, the Austrians' express war aim in 1809 had been to dismantle the Napoleonic settlement of Germany: to restore the mediatised princes at the direct expense of the *Mittelstaaten*. In these circumstances, Napoleon's attempt to build bridges to Vienna after 1809 only served to arouse the suspicions of his closest allies, and brought him no real benefits. His treatment of Prussia was one of gratuitous spite, but was also rooted in a fear of Prussia's well known diplomatic duplicity towards all parties, save Russia. That Napoleon did not disengage in the region was a cardinal mistake, but alternatives to his approach are not readily obvious.

2.2 Internal Opposition

The reactions of the peoples of Europe, the French included, to the collapse of 1812-14 leave little doubt that feelings for the regime ranged from the resentful to outright hatred, save within the ranks of the army and the bureaucracy. The prospect of war with Russia was generally dreaded in the corridors of power and the populace, alike, and all the dire predictions soon came true on a scale none had dared imagine. The allied advances along the North Sea Coast were followed and, occasionally, preceded, by popular revolts in the German cities and countryside, alike. In Milan, the capital of Napoleon's cherished kingdom of Italy, its finance minister, Prina, was lynched by a mob whose behaviour foreshadowed the fate of Mussolini in the same place in 1945. Devout Catholics welcomed the end of a regime which had imprisoned the Pope and affronted their consciences by the aggressively secular Concordat of Fontainebleau as late as the spring of 1813. Napoleon's appeals for a mass rising to resist the invaders and his attempts to revive the spirit of 1792 fell on deaf, often mocking ears. Bordeaux, battered by the blockade, welcomed Wellington with open arms and barrels. Nevertheless, to ask a different question—not *could*, but *did* these currents of opposition offer a real threat to the regime—must be answered in the negative. A coup against Napoleon by the republican general, Mallet, in late 1812, was easily put down, despite its extensive roots in parts of the army in France. Conscription was universally hated, yet it was enforced effectively to the end. The longstanding, deep rooted

sources of opposition and discontent were not sufficient of themselves, to bring down the regime.

When the blow came, it was at the apex of the state, at the point when France had ceased to be an empire in any meaningful sense, and its politics had reverted to a purely national context for all in its ruling elite, save Napoleon. It was here that the gulf, but also the commonality of interests, between Napoleon and his ruling elite emerged. His priority, as shown in the research of Munro Price, was to conserve those parts of his extra-French territories he knew to be essential to France; theirs was to preserve the essence of his political settlement of France, which a restoration of the Bourbons imposed by the allies without French mediation, would endanger. By the spring of 1814, the question was now about the personal fate of Napoleon, in a purely French context. The era of empire was over.

3 Conclusion: Apportioning Blame?

Paul Schroeder makes very clear that Napoleonic expansion was a flawed, doomed undertaking from the outset, that Napoleon's hegemony never possessed the resources needed to support his aggressive ambitions. Schroeder goes further, saying that attempts to set the Napoleonic empire into the context of imperialism are actually obstructionist. It was all about one man's ambitions.[32] This assertion attempts to analyse the nature of the empire in any other terms than this rely wholly on the counter-factual is not accurate. Indeed, to reject any comparative context is actually to ignore the major systemic weakness in Napoleon's hegemony: that common to any contiguous land empire proximate to powerful rivals. Nevertheless, Napoleon as the prime agent of expansion and collapse cannot be discounted. It does, nonetheless, need careful contextualisation.

The early phase of expansion had solid support among the ruling elite, if hardly among the mass of the populace. It was concerned with consolidating the gains of the 1790s and securing France's position as the dominant power in western and central Europe, at the expense of the Austrians. The crisis that originally brought Napoleon to power was triggered by the allied fight back in 1798-99 which brought the armies of the Second Coalition to the borders of old regime France, and was effected in great part by the renewed participation of Russia in the war. Part of Napoleon's 'brief' was to create an imperial buffer zone to protect France, and to weaken Austria in the process. The subsequent wars up to 1806, certainly, showed this position was still under threat and had to be defended, that of 1809 confirmed this. Up to a point, it was also a form of recompense for the irrevocable loss of overseas empire, sealed by the 1804 Louisiana Purchase. The intervention in Spain and the last annexations were viewed very differently, as was the war of 1812. As early as 1806, Napoleon was met in Berlin by a delegation from the Senate, asking him

[32] Schroeder (1994): 388-95.

to seek peace and avoid taking the war into Russia. He ignored this, on the grounds that a powerful Russian army was still on his borders, which now extended further than anyone had foreseen.

The last phase marks the period when Napoleon effectively became his own foreign minister, following the break with Talleyrand, the political result of which was to make it clear to those at the centre of government that he could not be controlled, the specific reason given by the Senate for deposing him in 1814. There can be little argument that Napoleon was a poor diplomat. The world of ancien regime dynastic sensibilities remained alien to him. He did not grasp that, although his own preoccupation was with the blockade, Alexander's was with Poland. Nor could he understand why a dynastic, familial matter—his annexation of the small Duchy of Oldenburg to bolster the Blockade—could offend Alexander and undermine their alliance. The importance of the family connection between its house and the Romanovs eluded him. Talleyrand believed firmly that a Franco-Russian alliance was doomed to failure, and he was probably right, but not for his stated reason that Russia was inherently aggressive or that France could not safely bind herself to one other state. It was a flawed enterprise because Alexander did not trust Napoleon, and much of that stemmed not just from Poland, but the manner in which he deposed the Spanish Bourbons: he saw deeply into Napoleon, and it was a man devoid of any intrinsic respect for his world. This is not to say any of this need have led to war. That came from Napoleon's fear that Alexander would strike him first, which was not unjustified, and that he had to eliminate the last military threat to him, while he could. Napoleon's declining health as an influence on his policies is, perhaps, in need of more evaluation.

None of this indicates that Napoleon's hegemony was inherently untenable or its fall inevitable. Alexander saw, more clearly than others that he could not hope to defeat Napoleon as long as the status quo of pre 1812 endured. Between the summer of 1810 and that of 1812, the tide in Spain had turned in favour of the French, when Napoleon was not distracted elsewhere. The French grip on Europe—and it was a French, not merely 'Napoleonic' grip—was firm. The quest to find weaknesses in this structure are rooted in the counter-factual, not the reverse, a Schroeder believes when he argues that Napoleon's 'strengths' reside only in the counter-factual.[33] More realistic is to assess the obvious weaknesses: How long could the European economies support the privations of the blockade? How long could exhausted populations bear the burden of mass conscription? The regime's goal was to end its dependence on both, but the disasters of 1812-13 introduced a different logic into the fate of Napoleonic Europe. Before that point, its fall could not be easily foreseen, nor was it, save by Napoleon.

[33] Schroeder (1994): 389-92.

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Das Ende des spanischen Kolonialreiches

Walther L. Bernecker

1 Die Fragestellungen

Seit Ende des 15. bis Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts – also gute 300 Jahre lang – verfügte Spanien in der Neuen Welt über ein enormes Kolonialreich. Ganz offensichtlich bedurfte es keiner besonderen militärischen oder administrativen Anstrengungen, dieses Reich beim Mutterland zu halten. Zwischen 1810 und 1825 verlor Spanien sodann, in der relativ kurzen Zeitspanne von 15 Jahren, jenes enorme Imperium, in dem die Sonne nicht unterging. Immer wieder ist in der Literatur die Frage gestellt worden: Wo liegen die Gründe für diese dramatischen Veränderungen, die Spanien endgültig zu einem zweit-, ja drittrangigen Land in Europa machten?

Über die Ursachenforschung hinaus hat die Geschichtswissenschaft weitere Fragen zur Unabhängigkeit Lateinamerikas gestellt:[1] War die Unabhängigkeitsbewegung nur ein Kampf um politische Selbständigkeit? Oder war sie auch eine soziale Revolution, die eine grundlegende Umgestaltung der kolonialen Gesellschaft anstrebte, in der die weiße Oberschicht die dominierende Stellung gegenüber der farbigen Bevölkerung einnahm? Konnte überhaupt eine Bewegung sozialrevolutionäre Zielsetzungen haben, in der die Angehörigen eben dieser Oberschicht, zu der auch die großen Befreier Simón Bolívar und José de San Martín zählten, die eindeutige Führung besaßen?

[1] CF. Buisson 1992: 46–55; Cf. Johnson 1994: 1–35; Cf. Rinke 2010.

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Ausgangspunkt der Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Unabhängigkeit und Revolution können die letzten Äußerungen von Simón Bolívar, dem großen *Libertador*, sein. In seiner letzten Botschaft an den Kongreß von Groß-Kolumbien hatte der sterbende Bolívar gesagt: „Unabhängigkeit ist alles, was wir gewonnen haben, und das auf Kosten von allem Anderen." Und einen Monat vor seinem Tod schrieb er: „Amerika ist unregierbar. Wer der Revolution dient, pflügt das Meer. Alles, was man in Amerika tun kann, ist emigrieren."[2]

Seit dieser skeptischen Einschätzung ist immer wieder die Frage nach der Bilanz von Kolonisation und Unabhängigkeit oder Dekolonisation diskutiert worden. Ist Bolívars pessimistische Sicht berechtigt, daß außer formeller Unabhängigkeit nichts gewonnen, dafür aber vieles verloren wurde, vor allem die Regierbarkeit Lateinamerikas?

Liest man die revolutionäre Propaganda des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts, so kann leicht der Eindruck entstehen, daß wirtschaftliche Verelendung durch zunehmende Bedrückung die Kolonien zum Unabhängigkeitskampf getrieben und die politische Unfreiheit ein Aufbegehren geradezu provoziert habe. So schrieb etwa der Vater Simón Bolívars, des Befreiers Südamerikas, im Jahre 1781: „Wir befinden uns in einem schmachvollen Gefängnis und werden schlechter behandelt als Negersklaven, denen ihre Herren mehr Vertrauen entgegenbringen. So bleibt uns kein anderer Ausweg, als so eine unerträgliche und gemeine Unterdrückung abzuwerfen."[3] Der Mann, der das schrieb, gehörte zu den reichsten und vornehmsten aristokratischen Familien Venezuelas, war Besitzer großer Güter und Plantagenbetriebe mit zahlreichen schwarzen Sklaven. Er hatte fünf Jahre am spanischen Hof verbracht und dort viele Ehrungen erfahren; er war nacheinander Stellvertreter des Gouverneurs, Stadtrichter und Oberst eines Milizregiments gewesen. Ein Gefängnisleben führte er fürwahr nicht. Aber auch sein junger Sohn Simón, der als reicher Kavalier durch die europäischen Länder reiste, hatte sich frühzeitig daran gewöhnt, von der Sklaverei seines Landes zu sprechen. Im Jahr 1805 bestieg der junge Simón Bolívar, der sich auf einer Wanderung durch Italien befand, den Monte Sacro und blickte hinab auf die antiken Baudenkmäler Roms. Auf diesem Hügel hatten sich, wie er wußte, vor mehr als 2000 Jahren die unterdrückten Plebejer zu ihrem erfolgreichen Kampf zusammengeschart, um einer überheblichen patrizischen Minderheit politische Gleichstellung und wirtschaftliche Gerechtigkeit abzutrotzen. Von Gefühlen überwältigt sank der junge Mann auf die Knie und schwor, seine Heimat vom Joch der spanischen Herrschaft zu befreien.

Aus der revolutionären Publizistik und Propaganda ist auch eine bis heute geläufige politische Erklärung des lateinamerikanischen Unabhängigkeitskampfes hervorgegangen. Die Emanzipation von den Mutterländern, so wird oft behauptet, war eine demokratische Revolution. Sie war, wie die englische und die französische, durch die sozialen Ungleichheiten hervorgerufen und verfolgte das gleiche Ideal, eine Gesellschaft auf der Grundlage von Vernunft und Recht aufzubauen, dem Menschen die Gleichheit vor dem

[2] Cit. Reinhard 1985: 251; Cf. Reinhard 2016.

[3] Cit. Konetzke 1960: 366.

Gesetz und die freie Entfaltung seiner Fähigkeiten zu garantieren und dem Leiden der unteren Volksklassen ein Ende zu setzen. Aber ging es tatsächlich um die Errichtung einer neuen demokratischen Gesellschaftsordnung im lateinamerikanischen Unabhängigkeitskampf?

Unter sozial- und wirtschaftsgeschichtlichen Fragestellungen ist auch die weitere These aufgestellt worden, dass die Emanzipation Lateinamerikas die Revolution des amerikanischen Bürgertums gewesen sei. Dieser Deutung zufolge stieg auch in Amerika eine bürgerliche Mittelschicht zwischen der Aristokratie der Großgrundbesitzer und Großhändler und den unteren Volksmassen auf, erfüllt mit bürgerlichem Selbstbewusstsein, und wurde die treibende Kraft in der Unabhängigkeitsbewegung. Der politische Freiheitskampf sollte dazu dienen, alle Fesseln zu zerbrechen, die von der Regierung des Mutterlandes dieser sozialen Schicht noch angelegt wurden. Wie weit aber, so ist zu fragen, hat es im spanischen und portugiesischen Amerika am Ende der Kolonialzeit einen bürgerlichen Mittelstand gegeben, der diese Revolution hätte durchführen können?

Die Unabhängigkeit der lateinamerikanischen Staaten erfolgte zu einem Zeitpunkt, zu dem in den wirtschaftlich fortgeschrittenen europäischen Ländern die industrielle Revolution neue Rohstoff- und Absatzmärkte dringend erforderlich machte. Während Lateinamerika die historische Phase seiner politischen Unabhängigkeit ohne im Vergleich zur vorhergehenden Epoche wesentliche ökonomische Veränderungen begann, erlebten große Teile Westeuropas zum gleichen Zeitpunkt grundlegende Umstrukturierungen ihrer Wirtschaftsverhältnisse. Auch im wichtigen Bereich des Außenhandels brachte die Emanzipation vom spanischen Mutterland den lateinamerikanischen Republiken vorerst keine wesentlichen Neuerungen. Sie blieben, was sie schon vorher waren: Lieferanten von Rohstoffen und Abnehmer europäischer Manufakturen. Was veränderte sich dann eigentlich? Trat tatsächlich ein Bruch mit der Kolonialzeit ein, oder muss man nicht vielmehr von einer Kontinuität der Strukturen sprechen?

2 Die bourbonischen Reformen

In der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts unternahmen die beiden iberischen Mächte – zuerst Portugal, später Spanien – eine gründliche Neuordnung ihrer Verwaltungs-, Militär- und Handelsbeziehungen mit ihren amerikanischen Besitzungen. Diese Reformen stellten einen wesentlichen Teil eines weiter gefassten Versuchs dar, in einem europäischen System, das allmählich zu einem Weltsystem wurde, eine weniger marginalisierte Position zu erhalten.[4]

[4] Cf. Herr 1958; Fisher 1970; Burkholder und Chandler 1979; Pietschmann 1972.

2.1 Gründe für die Reformen: die spanische „Dekadenz“

Die Anstöße zu ehrgeizigen Reformen waren vielfältiger Art. Zuerst ist darauf hinzuweisen, dass sich Spanien und Portugal ihrer Marginalität bewusst wurden und die Aufwärtsbewegung anderer Mächte eifersüchtig beobachteten, die einen immer größeren Einfluss auf die iberischen Reichsgebilde ausübten. Portugal etwa stellte eine Art Protektorat Englands dar, und Spanien musste seit dem Vertrag von Utrecht (1713) den Sklavenhandel mit seinen amerikanischen Kolonien erlauben. Beide iberischen Staaten waren daher an einer vollständigeren und sichereren Kontrolle der Wirtschaft ihrer Kolonien interessiert. Über die Bedeutung dieser Kontrolle bestand kein Zweifel: Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts war es bereits ein Gemeinplatz, dass für Spanien der amerikanische Besitz das Wichtigste und die Metropole nur das Sekundäre war; für Portugal gilt dies noch weit mehr. Hinzu kam, dass die allmähliche Umformung des europäischen in ein Weltsystem die Bedeutung der nichteuropäischen Regionen verstärkte.

Die Gefahr für die iberischen Reichssysteme lag auf der Hand. Daher war die militärische Dimension der angestrebten Reform zentral; die militärische Bedeutung nahm außerdem noch durch die iberischen Rivalitäten zu. Des Weiteren bezogen sich die Reformprojekte auf den wirtschaftlichen und den Verwaltungsbereich; es ist daher nicht verwunderlich, daß sie außerordentlich komplex, zum Teil sogar widersprüchlicher Art waren. Im wirtschaftlich-merkantilen Bereich etwa erstrebten die Reformen die Herausbildung komplexerer Wirtschaften in den Kolonien; zugleich sollte die Kolonialökonomie gegenüber der Wirtschaft des Mutterlandes komplementär sein. Denn aus der Perspektive der politischen Macht blieb das Mutterland die wichtigste Institution. Diese beiden Ziele ließen sich nicht immer leicht in Übereinstimmung bringen.

Die Stabilisierung der Verhältnisse im Mutterland war ohne politische und wirtschaftliche Belebung der Kolonien unmöglich. Die Reformen in Übersee erfassten zwar alle Zweige des gesellschaftlichen Lebens, dienten aber hauptsächlich der wirtschaftlichen Aufwärtsentwicklung zur Erhöhung der Finanzkraft, der Verbesserung des militärischen Schutzes gegen fremde Invasionen und der Zentralisation der Staatsgewalt. Die wichtigsten Maßnahmen wurden in der Kolonialverwaltung und der Wirtschaftspolitik durchgeführt. Die theoretische Begründung für die Neuorientierung der spanischen Kolonialpolitik gab eine Kolonialtheorie, die nach englisch-französischem Vorbild die Kolonien als Rohstoff- und Absatzmarkt der Metropole betrachtete.

Ausgelöst wurden die Versuche zur Reorganisation und Modernisierung der staatlichen Ordnung somit durch die im Ausland und in Spanien selbst weit verbreitete Vorstellung von der Dekadenz des iberischen Reiches in politischer, wirtschaftlicher und sozialer Hinsicht.[5] Dieses in weiten Kreisen der Bevölkerung verbreitete Dekadenzbewusstsein sicherte den Reformmaßnahmen eine breite Unterstützung. Im Rahmen der praktischen Politik stellte sich schon früh das Problem des Verhältnisses zu den Überseegebieten.

[5] Cf. Pietschmann 1980: 71 ff.

Durch konsequente Anwendung einer merkantilistischen Politik wurden ein aktiver Außenhandel und die Entwicklung von Gewerbe und Manufakturwesen angestrebt. Der Vorteil des Überseehandels sollte der spanischen Wirtschaft gesichert werden. Im Gefolge des Vordringens merkantilistischen Denkens und Handelns vollzog sich auch eine wichtige Veränderung der Einschätzung der Bedeutung der überseeischen Reiche Spaniens, die nunmehr zunehmend unter dem Gesichtspunkt ihres Nutzens für das Mutterland und dessen wirtschaftlichen Wohlergehens betrachtet wurden. Die Überseegebiete wurden jetzt, unter dem Einfluss merkantilistischer Planung, immer mehr als Kolonien im eigentlichen Sinne des Wortes angesehen. Staatsrechtlich war ja Amerika ein gleichberechtigtes Reich neben anderen Kernländern der spanischen Monarchie; die staatsrechtliche Bezeichnung lautete daher auch „reino“ oder „provincias“, analog zu den Bezeichnungen in Spanien selbst. Erst in Texten des 18. Jahrhunderts begegnet das Wort „colonia“. Mit dieser sich verändernden Haltung des Mutterlandes gegenüber seinem Überseeimperium war zwar keine Veränderung der staatsrechtlichen Stellung verbunden, doch wird man nicht übersehen dürfen, daß durch sie die Interessengegensätze zwischen Spanien und seinen Überseereichen allmählich verschärft wurden.

2.2 Ziele der Reformen: Wirtschaftsaufschwung und Sicherung des Imperiums

Einen entscheidenden Impuls erfuhr die Reformpolitik für Übersee durch die Schrift „Neues Regierungssystem für Amerika“ des Überseeministers José del Campillo (1743), der vorschlug, sämtliche Möglichkeiten zur wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung der Überseeterritorien zu nutzen und in allen amerikanischen Provinzen nach dem Vorbild des Mutterlandes Intendanten einzusetzen, die nicht nur Verwaltungsaufgaben haben sollten, sondern sich vor allem der Förderung der Landwirtschaft, des Gewerbes, des Handels und Verkehrs, der Besiedlung und kolonisatorischen Projekten zu widmen hätten. Die Überseegebiete sollten Rohstofflieferanten und Produzenten tropischer Agrarerzeugnisse für das zu entwickelnde spanische Manufakturwesen werden und sogleich dessen Waren abnehmen. Die Reorganisation der staatlichen Ordnung wurde somit als Mittel zur Verwirklichung eines volkswirtschaftlichen Gesamtplans angesehen. Aus moderner Perspektive könnte man Campillos Denkschrift als den ersten umfassenden und systematischen staatlichen Entwicklungsplan für Hispanoamerika bezeichnen, der freilich eine abhängige und subsidiäre Entwicklung für die Überseegebiete vorsah. Die historische Wirkung dieser Überlegungen war nachhaltig, prägte sie doch maßgeblich die Reformen unter Karl III. (1759–1788). Dieser ließ seit seinem Regierungsantritt deutlich werden, dass er die Sicherung des spanischen Überseeimperiums als seine vordringlichste Aufgabe ansah. Nach dem Siebenjährigen Krieg ließen die Maßnahmen der spanischen Regierung erkennen, dass die militärische Sicherung der Überseegebiete, die Möglichkeiten zur Finanzierung erhöhter Verteidigungsanstrengungen und die sich daraus ergebenden Konsequenzen für die Verwaltungsorganisation im Mittelpunkt der Kolonialpolitik

standen. Der ausgelöste Reformprozess gewann bald eine Eigendynamik, die weit über rein militär- und finanzpolitische Aspekte hinausreichte und die wohl einschneidendsten Veränderungen bewirkte, die Hispanoamerika seit dem 16. Jahrhundert erfuhr.

2.3 Die Militärreform: Militarisierung der Kolonialgesellschaft

Seit 1763 wurden in Amerika neue Festungen errichtet und ein stehendes Heer aufgebaut, dazu eine wirkungsvolle Miliz. Durch diese Reformen wurden weite Teile der Bevölkerung des spanischen Überseeimperiums mit der Funktionsweise, Taktik und Kampfesart des modernen Heerwesens vertraut. Man hat daher zu Recht darauf hingewiesen, dass die Maßnahmen Spaniens zur militärischen Sicherung seiner amerikanischen Besitzungen nicht bloß zu einer erheblichen Vermehrung der einsatzfähigen Truppen, sondern auch zu einer Militarisierung der kolonialen Gesellschaft geführt haben. Die Konsequenzen dieser Militarisierung wurden vor allem während der Unabhängigkeitskämpfe sichtbar. Die militärischen Anstrengungen Spaniens in Amerika hatten nicht nur erhebliche finanzielle Mehrbelastungen, sondern auch eine beträchtliche Zunahme der Verwaltungsaufgaben zur Folge.

2.4 Die Verwaltungsreform: Einführung des Intendantensystems

Von entscheidender Bedeutung für das Reformprojekt wurde José de Gálvez, der in den 1770er- und 1780er-Jahren „Indienminister“ war. Er führte während seiner Amtszeit ein umfangreiches Reformprogramm durch. Auf ihn geht auch der Vorschlag zurück, das Intendantensystem, das in der ersten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts in Spanien eingeführt worden war, auch in Amerika zu etablieren. Bei den Intendanten handelte es sich um nach Belieben abrufbare königliche Kommissare mit fast unbegrenzter Zuständigkeit auf allen Gebieten, von denen ebenso viel Sachverstand wie unbedingte Loyalität gegenüber der Zentrale in Madrid erwartet werden konnte. Gálvez sah in den Intendanten nicht nur Verwaltungsbeamte, sondern Förderer des Gemeinwohls und vor allem der Wirtschaft, die durch ihre Tätigkeit das Land zur vollen Blüte entwickeln würden. Durch die Einführung des Intendantensystems wurde eine Zwischeninstanz geschaffen, welche die überlieferten engen und direkten Verbindungen zwischen dem König und seinen Untertanen in Amerika empfindlich störte.

Die Intendanten waren hochdotierte und hochqualifizierte Fachleute für das sozioökonomische Entwicklungsprogramm, das ihre Aufgabe sein sollte. Mit dem für den Aufgeklärten Absolutismus kennzeichnenden Drang zur Reglementierung auch des kleinsten Details durch die überlegene Einsicht der Staatsgewalt ist dieses Programm in den Ordonnanzen niedergelegt. Obwohl die Intendanten vor allem auf dem Gebiet der Bildungs- und Wohlfahrtspolitik durchaus Erfolge verzeichnen konnten, hat die amerikanische Bevölkerung das neue System nicht angenommen, da zu viele etablierte

Interessen durch die damit verschärfte Staatsintervention verletzt wurden. Auch die Tendenz zur Einebnung alter Privilegien, die dem Aufgeklärten Absolutismus innewohnte, bewirkte eine Lockerung der Bindungen des Kreolentums, also der Weißen in Amerika, an die spanische Krone, da durch solche Maßnahmen die Vorrechte der kolonialen Führungsschicht beschnitten wurden. So geriet die Reformpolitik des Mutterlandes in Konflikt mit den Beharrungstendenzen des Kreolentums und führte zum Auseinandertreten von Staat und Gesellschaft.

Die bourbonische Verwaltungsreform ist von den Zeitgenossen sehr verschieden beurteilt worden. Die Vizekönige haben lebhaft gegen die Minderung ihrer Autorität protestiert, nachdem ihnen von den Intendanten wichtige Verwaltungsfunktionen weggenommen worden waren, und vor den zu erwartenden Folgen gewarnt. Der Vizekönig von Perú etwa berichtete 1786 an den König in Spanien, dass das Vizekönigreich „keine lauten Streitereien unter seinen obersten Beamten vertrage, ohne dass seine Erhaltung und Ruhe Gefahr laufen. Lassen wir uns nicht täuschen: Es gibt keine Monarchie, die sich aufrechterhalten kann, wenn sie nicht ein einziges Oberhaupt hat."[6]

Derartige Betrachtungen sind sehr aufschlussreich. Das spanische Kolonialreich hat seinen Bestand in 300 Jahren vor allem der starken monarchischen Gesinnung der Spanier in Amerika verdankt. Obgleich die spanischen Könige dort kaum ständige Truppen unterhielten, ist es in dieser langen Zeit zu keinen gefährlichen Aufständen gekommen. In der Regel genügte ein königlicher Befehl, um widerspenstige Gouverneure zur Unterwerfung zu bringen. Dieser traditionelle Respekt vor der Person des Monarchen war in Gefahr, sich allmählich zu verlieren, da die amerikanischen Untertanen nie Gelegenheit hatten, ihren König zu sehen. Unter diesen Umständen waren die Residenzen der Vizekönige in Amerika die einzigen Stätten, wo monarchische Gewohnheiten und Gesinnungen ihren sichtbarsten Kult fanden. So kann man sehr wohl fragen, ob nicht die Einführung des Intendantensystems im spanischen Amerika die Monarchie geschwächt und die revolutionäre Bewegung begünstigt hat. Weiter ist zu beobachten, wie gerade die alte Aristokratie in Amerika sich gegen den vordringenden Anstaltsstaat mit seiner Bürokratie wandte und sich gegen die Eingriffe in ihre überlieferten Rechte und Gewohnheiten wehrte.

Die Reformer hatten allerdings geglaubt, durch die neue Verwaltungsorganisation die Bande zwischen dem amerikanischen Reich und dem Mutterland gerade zu festigen. Karl III. hatte in seinen Instruktionen den Intendanten zur hauptsächlichen Pflicht gemacht, mit allen Mitteln „das Glück jener Untertanen zu befördern, die der Gegenstand meiner Sorgen und königlichen Aufmerksamkeiten sind".[7] Sie sollten die Korruption beseitigen, die Justiz sichern, den wirtschaftlichen Wohlstand heben, kurz: den aufgeklärten Rechts- und Wohlfahrtsstaat nach Amerika verpflanzen. Sie sollten das Cliquenwesen, das sich um die Vizekönige gebildet hatte, abschaffen und das Gesetz zur Geltung bringen. In der Tat

[6] Cit. Konetzke 1961: 162.

[7] Cit. Konetzke 1961: 164.

haben hohe ethische Prinzipien manchen amerikanischen Intendanten in seinem Reformeifer bestimmt. Die Intendanten vertraten ein weitgefasstes Programm, um durch Wohltaten die Zuneigung der Untertanen zu gewinnen und ihre Dankbarkeit und Anhänglichkeit gegenüber dem Herrscherhaus zu sichern.

Der aufgeklärte Rechts- und Wohlfahrtsstaat kündigte damit aber eine Revolution von oben an. Solche Maßnahmen der Regierung, die eine gerechtere Sozialordnung in Amerika herstellten und das Los der unteren Volksschichten, insbesondere die Lage der indigenen Bevölkerung, verbessern wollten, stießen auf den Widerstand der kreolischen Oberschicht. Die reichen und vornehmen Kreolen wurden durch die bourbonische Reformpolitik in eine lebhafte Opposition gegen die Regierung des Mutterlandes getrieben. Aus solcher Sicht erscheinen die hispanoamerikanischen Unabhängigkeitsbestrebungen sogar als eine Reaktion gegen den geschichtlichen Fortschritt. Es lässt sich wohl auch sagen, dass in dieser Hinsicht die Ära der ausgehenden spanischen Kolonialherrschaft moderner gewesen ist als die darauffolgende Epoche der unabhängigen Staaten im 19. Jahrhundert, wo unter der Herrschaft alter Oligarchien die sozialen Fragen ungelöst blieben.

Gegen die Reformpolitik opponierten vor allem jene sozialen Gruppierungen, die sich in ihren Interessen beeinträchtigt und um ihre Privilegien betrogen sahen. Hierzu zählten etwa weite Kreise des gegen den Regalismus der Krone eingenommenen Klerus; die Großkaufleute der alten sogenannten Konsulate, die durch die Liberalisierung des Warenverkehrs, die strikte Steuereinziehungspraxis und die Errichtung neuer Handelskonsulate in der Provinz ihrer Monopolstellung verlustig gegangen waren; Gruppen der städtischen Mittel- und Unterschichten, die durch die Einführung des Tabakmonopols ihre Einkommensmöglichkeiten verloren; Großgrundbesitzer, die durch die Verschärfung der Indianerschutzpolitik Probleme bei der Rekrutierung von indianischer Arbeitskraft bekamen; die traditionelle Beamtenschaft schließlich, die ihre alte Machtstellung durch die neuen Beamten bedroht sah. Der Widerstand führte sogar zu gewaltsamen Erhebungen gegen die Repräsentanten der Krone. Insgesamt trug die Politik Spaniens dazu bei, zahlreiche latente Interessenkonflikte zu verschärfen und Gewaltmaßnahmen auszulösen. Die Unabhängigkeitskämpfe zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts sind somit sicherlich zu einem großen Teil durch die Reformen des Aufgeklärten Absolutismus beschleunigt oder vorbereitet worden.

2.5 Die Wirtschaftsreform: Wachstum und gesellschaftliche Veränderungen

Aus der von der spanischen Krone anvisierten Zielvorstellung einer Steigerung und Konzentration der Staatsmacht ergab sich auch eine Akzentverschiebung in der amerikanischen Wirtschafts- und Finanzpolitik. Der stufenweise Abbau der habsburgischen Monopolgesetzgebung durch die Bourbonen schuf Voraussetzungen für eine stabilere Entwicklung von Handel, Bergbau und Manufaktur. Die Ideen der führenden spanischen Ökonomisten des 18. Jahrhunderts spiegelten sich am klarsten in der

Handelspolitik wider. Auf diesem Gebiet wurde die bedeutendste Reform der Epoche verwirklicht.

Der erste Schritt zur Aufhebung des starren Flottensystems war die Zulassung von Handelskompanien. Die einzelnen Handelsgesellschaften betrieben Kakaohandel, Farbholzhandel, Zuckerrohr- und Tabakhandel. Parallel zur Vergabe der Handelsprivilegien erfolgte 1740 die Aufhebung des Flottenverkehrs, 1765 wurde der Antillenhandel für acht spanische Städte freigegeben. Die interkolonialen Handelsschranken fielen zwischen 1768 und 1776. Die unaufhaltsame Liberalisierung des Handels führte 1778 zur Verkündung des Freihandelsreglements, das für 13 spanische und 24 amerikanische Häfen galt. Die Einfuhr spanischer Nationalprodukte erfuhr gegenüber ausländischen Waren eine Zollbegünstigung zwischen 50 und 75 Prozent.[8]

Die Wirtschaftspolitik der Krone konzentrierte sich auf die Förderung des Silberbergbaus. Um 1800 förderte der hispanoamerikanische Bergbau (schwerpunkmäßig in Neu-Spanien) 90 Prozent der gesamten Weltausbeute an Silber. Die Förderleistung der Gruben erhöhte sich seit 1700 auf das Fünffache, und allein der Export zwischen 1750 und 1800 war größer als der Gesamtertrag von 1492 bis 1700. Gemessen am Silberbergbau blieben die Gewinnung und Verarbeitung anderer Metalle unbedeutend.

Im Süden des Kontinents hatten an der Ausbreitung der Viehzucht nach 1740 die Liberalisierung des außen- und interkolonialen Handels und die zunehmende Urbanisierung des Vizekönigreichs La Plata wesentlichen Anteil. Die Rinderzucht im Hinterland von Montevideo und Buenos Aires entwickelte sich in direkter Abhängigkeit von den Bedürfnissen der industriellen Umwälzung in Europa (benötigt wurden Wolle, Häute, Felle, Rosshaar, Salzfleisch). Die Herden am La Plata umfassten zehn Millionen Rinder; über den Hafen von Buenos Aires wurden jährlich etwa 1,5 Millionen Häute ausgeführt. Das wachsende spezifische Gewicht der landwirtschaftlichen Produktion äußerte sich darin, daß der Gesamtwert der Agrarprodukte Neuspaniens zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts den Bergbau bereits um 25 Prozent übertraf.

Ökonomisch, soviel lässt sich zusammenfassend sagen, führten die Reformen zu einem Aufschwung der Wirtschaft in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts. Dies gilt eigentlich für sämtliche Bereiche: Bergwerke, Handel, Landwirtschaft. Erhöhte Steuereinnahmen waren ein deutlicher Reflex dieses gesteigerten Wirtschaftswachstums.[9] Die Wirkungen des Wirtschaftswachstums auf die Gesellschaft waren allerdings sehr unterschiedlich:

Was die Wirkung auf die Eliten betrifft, so profitierten die Bergwerksbesitzer und die Händler in vielen Fällen, die Großgrundbesitzer nur manchmal. Öfter, etwa im mexikanischen Fall, kam es zu einem Investitionstransfer aus den Bergwerken und aus dem Handel in die Landwirtschaft, so dass hier eine sehr enge Verflechtung der verschiedenen Teileliten erfolgte. Anders war die Wirkung dieser Reformen etwa in Peru, wo es zu einer konfliktiven Intra-Elitenbeziehung kam. Die Auswirkungen auf die

[8] Kossok und Markov 1956.

[9] Cf. Fisher 1977; Brading 1978; Fisher 1981.

Eliten müssen somit je nach Sektor und Region differenziert betrachtet werden. Eines aber stellt gewissermaßen eine gemeinsame Auswirkung dieser Reformen dar: Trotz aller Differenzierung und unterschiedlichen Auswirkungen auf die Eliten erfolgte in dem Augenblick zwischen den verschiedenen Fraktionen der Eliten ein enger Schulterschluss, als es darum ging, sich gegenüber den Nichteliten zusammenzuschließen. Das gesamte gesellschaftliche System im kolonialen Amerika war nach einem „Kastensystem" geordnet, wo je nach Hautfarbe ganz bestimmte Rechte und Funktionen zugesprochen wurden. Dieses Kastensystem war relativ, aber nicht hundertprozentig rigide; es erlaubte bestimmte Überschreitungen von der einen in die andere Kaste. Jedenfalls garantierte es die dominante Position der Weißen in der Gesellschaft. Das System war zugleich ein ungefähr zweieinhalb Jahrhunderte lang gut funktionierendes Staatsinstrument zur sozialen Kontrolle der amerikanischen Gesellschaft, und es verhinderte zugleich das Zusammengehen verschiedener Schichten, die sich möglicherweise gegen die spanische Krone hätten zusammenschließen können. Der ökonomische Druck, der jetzt durch die bourbonischen Reformen ausgeübt wurde, und das Erfordernis, ein Wirtschaftswachstum zugunsten des Mutterlandes zu erzielen, führten zu Veränderungen in dieser langen Zeit relativ stabil gebliebenen gesellschaftlichen Struktur.

Damit sind die Auswirkungen der bourbonischen Reformen auf die große Masse der Landarbeiter, der Arbeiter in den Bergwerken und in den Manufakturbetrieben angesprochen. Die größte Last fiel zweifellos auf die Arbeiter: Die höheren Steuern waren vor allem höhere indirekte Steuern und belasteten damit primär den ärmsten Teil der Bevölkerung. Da zur weiteren Förderung von Mineralien keine neuen Techniken eingeführt wurden, bedeutete dies, dass die vorhandene Arbeitskraft noch mehr ausgebeutet werden musste. Hinzu kam – durch das demographische Wachstum gerade im 18. Jahrhundert – ein Überangebot an Arbeitskräften, was eine zusätzliche Verschlechterung der Arbeitsmarktsituation hervorrief. Insgesamt, das haben verschiedene Regionalstudien ergeben, kann man verallgemeinernd sagen, dass es zu einem Sinken des Lebensstandards der überwiegenden Mehrheit der Bevölkerung Lateinamerikas im Verlauf der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts kam. Immer offensichtlicher wurden in dieser Zeit die Sozialkosten des wirtschaftlichen Wachstums auf der Grundlage einer verschärften Ausbeutung der großen Masse der Bevölkerung.[10]

2.6 Sozialrevolten und kreolische Abwendung von Spanien

Es kommt sicherlich nicht von ungefähr, dass gerade in dieser Zeit die Volksaufstände und sozialen Revolten immer mehr zunahmen, nach 1750 in einzelnen Gegenden – etwa in Peru – in geradezu dramatischer Form. Sie waren ein Ausdruck großer Unzufriedenheit der

[10] Cf. Ladd 1976; Socolow 1978; Golte 1980; Muñoz Oraá 1964; Mörner 1967; Halperín Donghi 1972.

breiten Masse der Bevölkerung. Historiker haben diese Aufstände sehr unterschiedlich interpretiert. Einige bezeichnen sie als primitive Rebellionen, die primär konservativ orientiert waren, da sie sich nur gegen ganz bestimmte Missstände richteten. Andere deuten sie als Vorläufer der Unabhängigkeitsbewegung, als ersten Ausdruck des kreolischen Nationalismus, der bereits deutlich gegen die spanische Herrschaft gerichtet war. Wiederum andere interpretieren sie als sozialrevolutionäre Bewegungen zum Umsturz der sozialen und der ökonomischen Struktur. Unabhängig davon nun, welcher dieser Interpretationen man in dem einen oder anderen Fall nähertreten möchte,[11] bleibt entscheidend, dass die weißen Eliten eine ganz bestimmte Perzeption dieser Aufstände hatten:

Sie interpretierten sie allemal als gegen die Fortführung der Herrschaft der Weißen gerichtet. Wenn es am Anfang eine Unterstützung dieser Aufstände durch lokale und regionale weiße Eliten gab, die ja ebenfalls durch die bourbonischen Maßnahmen tangiert worden waren und sich deswegen häufig mit gewissen Zielen dieser Aufstände identifizierten, so rückten sie bald von dieser Unterstützung ab – und zwar in dem Maße, in dem die Umsturzgefahr insgesamt wuchs und die dominanten Schichten sich der Gefahr bewusst wurden, die von diesen Aufständen ausging. In der Literatur hat man auch von „pan-ethnischen Koalitionen“ (Phelan) gesprochen, was diese Aufstände betrifft, weil hier eine über die ethnischen Grenzen hinausgehende Koalition erfolgte, so dass man wohl von einer neuen Stufe des Sozialkonflikts sprechen kann. Insgesamt bedeutet das:

Durch die bourbonischen Reformen ist das System rassischer Hierarchie, das Kastensystem, zumindest vorübergehend und partiell aufgelöst worden. Gerade auf dieses System waren aber weitgehend die Sicherheit und die Position der Weißen zurückzuführen. Die Techniken der Trennung der einzelnen Rassen und der Kooptation, die im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert über dieses System so gut funktioniert hatten, lösten sich damit auf und machten der weißen Elite klar, dass gegen Ende des 18. und im 19. Jahrhundert dieses System nicht mehr funktionieren würde. Daraufhin wandten sich diese weißen Eliten und die Kreolen erneut an den Staat, der als einzige Institution die Bedrohung von unten eindämmen konnte. Der Staat hatte das oft genug bewiesen: Während die Milizen versagten, konnten doch die spanischen Soldaten diese Aufstände in der ersten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts immer wieder ohne allzu große Probleme niederschlagen. Gerade in dieser entscheidenden Situation hat der spanische Staat jedoch die Kreolen gewissermaßen „alleingelassen“. Er hat die kreolische Repräsentation in den Kolonialbürokratien, in den Ämtern klar reduziert, er hat sich nicht für sie und ihre Interessen in Übersee eingesetzt. Die Kreolen wurden sich also der Gefahr bewusst, die von unten auf sie zukam; zugleich war ihnen klar, dass sie in dieser entscheidenden Situation nicht mehr wie früher auf den Staat zurückgreifen konnten, um ihre Interessen zu verteidigen. Damit haben sich die Beziehungen zwischen den Kolonialeliten und dem spanischen Staat grundlegend gewandelt. Man kann wohl sagen, der Staat selber war es, der diese Beziehungen

[11] Flores Galindo 1976; Phelan 1978.

erschüttert hat, gerade als die Eliten dringend der Unterstützung durch diesen Staat in ihrer Konfrontation mit den Massen bedurft hätten.

3 Aufklärung und Revolution

Was die geistigen Triebkräfte der iberoamerikanischen Unabhängigkeitsbewegungen angeht, so sind in der Forschung vor allem drei Aspekte untersucht worden: zum einen die Bedeutung der Französischen Revolution als ideologische Voraussetzung des Freiheitskampfes, zum anderen der Kampf der nordamerikanischen Kolonien gegen Großbritannien als Vorbild für Lateinamerika, schließlich die Rolle der Aufklärungsphilosophie als geistige Triebkraft des Unabhängigkeitskampfes.

3.1 Französische Revolution und Unabhängigkeit der USA

Im Hinblick auf die revolutionären Ereignisse in Frankreich ist sich die heutige Forschung weitgehend darin einig, dass sie keine unmittelbare Auswirkung auf die politische Erhebung der Amerikaner gegen das spanische und portugiesische Mutterland hatten. Mehr als 20 Jahre vergingen, bis die iberoamerikanischen Revolutionen ausbrachen. Allerdings wurde die Französische Revolution in ihrer ersten und zweiten Phase bis 1793 von den herrschenden Schichten in Lateinamerika fast ausnahmslos begrüßt. Die jakobinischen Auswüchse indes, die „fatalen Konsequenzen der extremen Freiheit“, wie es der venezolanische Unabhängigkeitskämpfer Francisco de Miranda formuliert hat, stießen auf die entschiedene Ablehnung aller Besitzenden. Die revolutionären Ausschreitungen und Terrorakte verbreiteten – übrigens genauso wie die Massaker in Zusammenhang mit der Sklavenemanzipation auf Haiti – in Lateinamerika Schrecken und übten eine Schockwirkung aus, die die Emanzipation eher verzögerte als beschleunigte. Insbesondere erweckten die antikirchlichen und antireligiösen Tendenzen der Revolution in weiten Kreisen der Iberoamerikaner lebhaften Abscheu.

Auch die Unabhängigkeitserklärung der USA im Jahre 1776 und die nach dem nordamerikanischen Freiheitskampf im Jahre 1783 anerkannte Unabhängigkeit der Neuenglandstaaten mussten auf Lateinamerika Rückwirkungen haben. Zum ersten Mal hatten in der Neuen Welt europäische Kolonien sich vom Mutterland gelöst und ihre politische Selbständigkeit errungen. Das Beispiel der englischen Siedler hatte jedoch nicht zwangsläufig die gleiche Bewegung im Bereich der spanischen und portugiesischen Kolonialherrschaft ausgelöst. Allerdings blieb die nordamerikanische Erhebung ein mahnendes Vorbild. Man übersetzte und verbreitete in Iberoamerika die Unabhängigkeitserklärung von 1776 sowie Schriften, Reden und Proklamationen von Washington, Jefferson, Paine, Franklin und anderen. Der nordamerikanische Unabhängigkeitskrieg schuf für die kreolische Opposition das erstrebenswerte Beispiel, für dessen Verbreitung Spanien selbst durch Teilnahme am Krieg sorgte. Schon Zeitgenossen hatten die

Unterstützung des nordamerikanischen Unabhängigkeitskrieges durch die spanische Krone als Gefährdung des Fortbestandes auch des spanischen Kolonialbesitzes und damit als Fehler der spanischen Politik beurteilt. Der Unabhängigkeitskrieg im Norden rief zwar keine unmittelbare Parallelbewegung unter den Amerikaspaniern hervor; wohl aber trug die vom angelsächsischen Amerika erkämpfte Unabhängigkeit als Beispiel erfolgreichen Widerstandes gegen koloniale Herrschaft längerfristig zur Stärkung von Emanzipationstendenzen in Hispanoamerika bei.

3.2 Aufklärungsphilosophie als geistige Triebkraft

Immer wieder ist in der Literatur von der Bedeutung der Aufklärung als Voraussetzung für die Unabhängigkeitsbewegung Lateinamerikas gesprochen worden. Sicher: Im 18. Jahrhundert erreichte die vernunftorientierte Aufklärung auch die spanischen Kolonien, wenn auch die Kolonialbehörden und die Inquisition die Lektüre politisch anstößiger Schriften zu verbieten und zu verhindern suchten. Weder amtliche Kontrolle noch kirchliche Zensur vermochten jedoch das Eindringen der europäischen Aufklärungsliteratur aufzuhalten. Die zahlreichen Zirkel und politischen Clubs, die legal oder illegal für die Verbreitung der Aufklärungsliteratur sorgten, wurden zur Schule vieler revolutionärer Intellektueller, die einige Jahre später die antispanische Erhebung anführten. Die von der Inquisition strengstens verbotene „Histoire Philosophique“ des Abbé Raynal wurde zur Offenbarung aller Gegner kolonialer Ausbeutung. Bolívar selbst beschäftigte sich intensiv mit Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire und anderen Franzosen; aufklärerische Ideen gaben ihm das ideologische Fundament seines Freiheitskampfes. Die Begriffe der Unabhängigkeit, der Volkssouveränität, des Fortschritts und der Zivilisation sind aus solcher Lektüre in seine Reden und Denkschriften übergegangen und in seiner politischen Propaganda wirksam geworden.

Trotz vielfältiger Berührung mit französischen und englischen Aufklärungsschriften handelte es sich bei der lateinamerikanischen Rezeption allerdings um eine eklektizistische Form der Aufklärung, die vor allem vor der Religion Halt machte. Sie blieb im Wesentlichen auf Wissenschaft, Technik und Wirtschaft beschränkt, drang aber nicht in das religiöse Leben ein. Das englische Freidenkertum oder die rationalistische Kritik an Offenbarung, Dogma und Kirche fanden keine Anhänger. Das Denken der Aufklärung wurde primär und partiell unter dem Aspekt seines praktischen Nutzens für eine Politik der Mobilisierung der Kräfte Spaniens in allen Bereichen staatlichen Lebens übernommen. Da aufklärerisches Gedankengut primär regional, vor allem in den Europa zugewandten Regionen aufgenommen wurde, und die Rezeption sich nur auf einen kleinen Kreis kreolischer Advokaten und Teile der Geistlichkeit beschränkte, neigt die neuere Forschung (gegenüber früher) dazu, die Bedeutung der europäischen Aufklärung als eines

ideologischen Faktors in der Unabhängigkeit des spanischen Amerika erheblich einzuschränken.[12]

4 Der Nationalismus: Kreolen versus Europäer

Allerdings hat die kritische Auseinandersetzung mit aufklärerischem Gedankengut durchaus Voraussetzungen für die Unabhängigkeitsbewegung geschaffen. Während nämlich die europäische Aufklärung einerseits das Bild des noch nicht durch zivilisatorische Einflüsse verdorbenen „edlen Wilden" zeichnete, vertrat sie andererseits, in Anlehnung an die Klimatheorie des Aristoteles, die Auffassung, dass die geistige und materielle Kultur der Bewohner Amerikas naturgemäß derjenigen Europas unterlegen sei. Diese Vorstellung provozierte unter den Kreolen lebhaften Widerspruch. Die daraufhin einsetzenden Auseinandersetzungen förderten im spanischen Amerika die Ausformung eines kulturellen Eigenbewusstseins, das als geistige Loslösung von der Alten Welt eine Vorstufe in der Entwicklung von Emanzipationstendenzen im staatlichen Bereich bildete. amerikanischen Eigenbewegung konnte zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts an einen erwachenden amerikanischen Patriotismus appellieren. In der Verteidigung der amerikanischen Eigenart und Gleichberechtigung gegenüber Europa entstand ein geistig begründeter Nationalismus. Dieser Patriotismus und Nationalismus der Kreolen äußerte sich in einem geradezu übertriebenen Optimismus. Das gestiegene Selbstwertgefühl der Kreolen war ein wichtiger Faktor bei ihrer zunehmenden Entfremdung vom spanischen Mutterland. Zu dieser Entfremdung trugen vor allem die wachsenden Gegensätze zwischen Kreolen und Europaspaniern bei, die sich in der Frage der Ämterbesetzung äußerten. Die immer massiver vorgetragene Forderung nach politischer Gleichstellung mit den Spaniern bedeutete für die Kreolen den Anspruch auf die Beherrschung des Staatsapparates und damit die faktische Liquidierung des Kolonialregimes.[13] Scharfe Spannungen zwischen Kreolen und Europaspaniern entstanden auch durch den schnellen wirtschaftlichen Aufstieg der Neueinwanderer. Im Laufe des 18. Jahrhunderts mehrten sich die Anzeichen, dass die Kolonialherrschaft als Bedrückung und als Fremdherrschaft empfunden wurde; es kam zu Unruhen, die sich vornehmlich gegen gewisse Reformen der absolutistischen Monarchie richteten und eigentlich einen konservativen Charakter hatten, da es häufig um die Verteidigung bestehender Rechte ging. Gleichwohl waren sie ein Ausdruck dafür, dass die Gesellschaft der Kreolen sich ihrer Eigenart und ihrer Macht bewusst wurde. Der Nationalismus der Kreolen war möglicherweise sogar (zumindest wird das in einem Teil der Forschung vertreten) die stärkste historische Kraft, die das spanische und das portugiesische Imperium auseinandergesprengt hat. Damit gehören diese amerikanischen Bewegungen auch in die Geschichte der modernen Nationalidee.

[12] Cf. Prien 1978: 327–367; Whitaker 1969.

[13] Cf. Chance 1978; Figueroa 1961; Stein 1981: 2–28.

5 Exogene Faktoren der Unabhängigkeitsbewegung: Napoleon und der Zerfall der Metropole

Die bisher skizzierten allgemeinen Tendenzen würden nicht so bald oder vielleicht gar nicht die Emanzipationsbewegung zum erfolgreichen Durchbruch gebracht haben, wenn sie nicht durch politische Ereignisse in Europa gefördert worden wären. Letztlich wurde nämlich der Ausbruch der spanisch-amerikanischen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung nicht durch interne Vorgänge der Neuen Welt, sondern durch politische und militärische Ereignisse in Europa ausgelöst.

5.1 Kreolische Ablehnung des französischen Usurpators

In Spanien lag die Krone seit 1788 in den Händen des unfähigen Karl IV., unter dem das Land zum Spielball fremder Mächte herabsank. Im Frühjahr 1808 lieferten der Sturz Karls IV. und die Thronbesteigung von dessen Sohn Ferdinand Napoleon den Vorwand zum Eingreifen in die spanischen Verhältnisse. Der französische Kaiser zwang die spanischen Bourbonen zur Abdankung, Napoleons Bruder Joseph Bonaparte wurde zum spanischen König proklamiert. Die Nachricht von der Einsetzung Joseph Bonapartes als spanischer König rief in Amerika lebhafte Bestürzung und Verwirrung hervor. Die kreolische Haltung zu den Ereignissen in Spanien sollte den Verlauf der Unabhängigkeitsbewegung wesentlich prägen.[14]

Infolge der politischen und militärischen Wirren, als die alten Gewalten zusammenbrachen und Spanien von fremden Heeren okkupiert wurde, bestand für das Land nicht die Möglichkeit, aktiv in die Verhältnisse seiner überseeischen Besitzungen einzugreifen. Diese historische Situation im Mutterland ergab den Moment, in dem das spanische Amerika sich emanzipieren sollte. Denn durch die Ereignisse in Europa wurden die spanisch-amerikanischen Kolonien vor die Entscheidung gestellt, ob sie, dem Beispiel der Bevölkerung des Mutterlandes folgend, Ferdinand VII. weiterhin anerkennen oder aber die neue napoleonische Dynastie akzeptieren sollten. Während sich in einigen Fällen die spanischen Kolonialbehörden der Anerkennung Joseph Bonapartes zunächst nicht abgeneigt zeigten, wandte sich die kreolische Bevölkerung von Anfang an energisch gegen die Ansprüche der neuen napoleonischen Dynastie. Ihre nahezu einhellige Ablehnung nötigte die spanischen Kolonialbehörden, dieselbe Haltung auch dort einzunehmen, wo sie bereits in Verbindung mit französischen Emissären standen. Eine Welle der Begeisterung für die Person des gefangenen Ferdinand VII. durchlief damals das spanische Amerika.

[14] Cf. Humphreys und Lynch 1966; Lynch 1986, 1994.

5.2 Die Junta-Bewegung zwischen Loyalität und Unabhängigkeitsstreben

Die Bereitschaft der Kreolen, der angestammten Dynastie der Bourbonen die Treue zu halten, verband sich jedoch mit dem Wunsch, die Gunst des Augenblicks zu nutzen, um die eigene Stellung gegenüber den spanischen Kolonialbehörden zu stärken und diese durch Organe der Selbstregierung zu ersetzen. Diese Bestrebungen gewannen Gestalt in der spanisch-amerikanischen Junta-Bewegung. Auf Initiative der Stadträte wurden namentlich in den größeren Städten kreolische Regierungsausschüsse errichtet, die den Anspruch erhoben, im Namen Ferdinands VII. zu regieren. Die Juntas wollten somit für die überseeischen Besitzungen weitgehende Selbständigkeit, allerdings noch im Rahmen des spanischen Imperiums erlangen. Noch überwog das Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit zu Spanien und zum angestammten Herrscher.

Staatsrechtlich wurden die Kompetenzen, die die lateinamerikanischen *Juntas* für sich beanspruchten, mit Theorien der Lehre vom Gesellschaftsvertrag und der Volkssouveränität begründet, die einerseits durch die Aufklärung im spanischen Amerika verbreitet worden waren, andererseits jedoch auch in der Tradition der Naturrechtslehren der spanischen Spätscholastik lagen.

Erst, als in der Neuen Welt die Nachricht eintraf, dass die französischen Truppen nahezu ganz Spanien besetzt hatten und die Lage der bourbonischen Dynastie hoffnungslos war, übernahmen die *Juntas* die Regierungsgewalt und erklärten die Unabhängigkeit der ihnen unterstehenden Territorien, wodurch Amerika sich von dem französisch gewordenen Spanien löste. Als schließlich auch noch 1811 die liberalen *Cortes* von Cádiz nicht bereit waren, eine Gleichberechtigung Amerikas anzuerkennen, sondern darauf bestanden, dass die Führung der Universalmonarchie bei Spanien liegen müsse, war dies für die Vertreter aus Übersee der endgültige Beweis dafür, dass auch ein liberales Spanien keine Gewähr für die politische Freiheit Amerikas bot. So erschien nicht mehr der Absolutismus Ferdinands VII. als Widersacher Amerikas, sondern Spanien schlechthin. Der Kampf der Kreolen wurde deshalb zum Unabhängigkeitskampf, das Ziel war jetzt die völlige Emanzipation von Spanien.[15]

6 Die Antworten

Mit der weiter oben skizzierten Erklärung, warum die Kreolen sich vom spanischen Staat abwandten, ist bereits eine Antwort auf die Frage gegeben, ob es sich bei den Bewegungen zwischen 1810 und 1825 primär um Unabhängigkeitsbewegungen oder um Revolutionen handelte, ob die Elemente der Kontinuität oder die der Diskontinuität stärker zu gewichten sind. Die Antwort lautet: Abgesehen vom politischen Bereich überwiegen eindeutig die

[15] Cf. Krebs 1961: 17–59; Anna 1979; Benson 1966.

Elemente der Kontinuität im Bereich des Sozialen und des Ökonomischen. Die Grundstruktur der kolonialen Bevölkerung, in der eine dünne weiße Oberschicht von der Masse der farbigen Unterschicht getrennt war und sie beherrschte, wurde durch die Unabhängigkeitsepoche nicht abgeschafft. Es gab zwar eine Reihe von Veränderungen: Das europaspanische Element schied aus, das allerdings auch vorher nur eine Minderheit innerhalb der weißen Minderheit gebildet hatte. Aber der Charakter der weißen Oberschicht änderte sich nicht. Der soziale Wandel während oder im Gefolge der Unabhängigkeitsbewegung erfolgte nur in sehr begrenztem Umfang. Alles in allem waren die iberoamerikanischen Unabhängigkeitsbewegungen primär ein Kampf um nationale Souveränität und um politische Reformen, nicht aber Revolutionen mit dem Ziel des gesellschaftlichen Umsturzes. Auf sozialem Gebiet wird vielmehr eine auffällig koloniale Physiognomie deutlich, auch während des 19. Jahrhunderts. Trotz verbaler Bekenntnisse zu den Prinzipien von 1789 und 1791 blieb die auf ethnischer und sozialer Differenzierung aufbauende Struktur der Kolonialgesellschaft erhalten. Hauptziel war die politische Unabhängigkeit. Die herrschenden Schichten waren an der Aufrechterhaltung des sozialen *Status quo ante* interessiert. Sozialrevolutionäre Zielsetzungen lagen einer Bewegung fern, in der die Angehörigen der weißen Oberschicht die eindeutige Führung besaßen. Wo solche Tendenzen trotzdem in Erscheinung traten – etwa in Mexiko[16] zwischen 1810 und 1815 -, trafen sie auf den nahezu geschlossenen Widerstand der weißen Bevölkerung und vermochten sich nicht durchzusetzen. Im Hinblick auf das Beharren der lateinamerikanischen Gesellschaften lässt sich somit auf drei Elemente hinweisen:

1. Die Unabhängigkeitsbewegung war primär ein Intra-Eliten-Konflikt. Eine grundsätzliche Neuordnung der Gesellschaft stand nicht ernsthaft zur Debatte.
2. Es kamen zwar neue Schichten auf, z. B. eine neue Gruppe von Bergwerksbesitzern, Plantageneignern, Exporteuren, Importeuren, nach und nach auch eine neue Mittelschicht im sich ausweitenden Sektor staatlicher Dienstleistungen und im Handel, doch muss man sich davor hüten, in diesen Gruppen die gleichen „Change-Agents“ zu sehen, wie das aus Europa oder den USA bekannt ist. Die neuen funktionalen Eliten vermischten sich rasch mit der alten Oligarchie, deren Wertmuster, Normen und Statussymbole sie möglichst zu übernehmen versuchten. Die neuen Mittelschichten bemühten sich, den Lebensstil und das Sozialverhalten der Oberschicht zu kopieren. Eine Intelligenzschicht typisch bürgerlich-demokratischer Prägung entfaltete sich nicht. Zwar waren viele Juristen als Führer von Aufständen in der Emanzipationsbewegung vertreten, sie waren aber keine Repräsentanten eines bürgerlichen Mittelstandes, müssen vielmehr nach ihrer Herkunft und Mentalität zur kreolischen Oberschicht gerechnet werden. Einen gewerblich-dynamischen Mittelstand wiederum gab es schon deshalb nicht, weil bis zum Ende der Kolonialzeit die Auffassung aristokratischer Art

[16] Cf. MacLachlan und Rodríguez 1990; Rodríguez und Jaime 1989; Meißner 1993; Anna 1978; Hamnett 1980: 1–27; Buve und Fisher 1992: 142–189.

bestand, dass die Gewinnung des Lebensunterhalts durch der Hände Arbeit eines freien und vornehmen Mannes unwürdig sei. Und was fast gänzlich fehlte, war das Manufakturbürgertum als aktive revolutionäre Kraft.[17]

3. Der große Rest der lateinamerikanischen Bevölkerung, somit 80–95 %, spielte in den meisten politischen Zusammenhängen keine wahrnehmbare Rolle. Für die lateinamerikanischen Staaten waren die Campesinos, landlose Tagelöhner, Indios, Dienstleute, Handwerker, Hilfsarbeiter usw. keine ernsthaft ins politische Kalkül zu ziehenden Größen. Auch nach der Unabhängigkeit setzte sich somit die Oligarchisierung der Gesellschaft fort.

Ob die Eliten in den einzelnen Kolonialteilen für Unabhängigkeit plädierten, für Verbleib bei Spanien oder eine überlegte Neutralität, hing wesentlich von dem Grad ab, in dem ihre Aktion die notwendigen Bedingungen schaffen würde, um die aktuelle oder potentielle Rebellion der Massen einzudämmen. Zusammen mit der Notwendigkeit der Eliten, Volksunterstützung bei ihren politischen und militärischen Konfrontationen mit Spanien zu erhalten, war dieses Ziel entscheidend für die Konzessionen, die die revolutionären Regierungen eben diesen Massen machten. Es erscheint daher einleuchtend, daß die Unabhängigkeitsbewegung in den stärker von Weißen besiedelten, agrarexportorientierten Rändern des Kolonialreiches, in Venezuela und am Río de la Plata, begann. In den stark indigen besiedelten kolonialen Zentren, den Vizekönigreichen Perú und Neu-Spanien, zögerten die kreolischen Führungsschichten aus Furcht vor den indianischen Bevölkerungsmehrheiten länger, sich vom spanischen Mutterland loszusagen. Und in der Sklavenhaltergesellschaft der Zuckerinsel Kuba verzichtete die weiße Herrenschicht zur gleichen Zeit auf die nationale Unabhängigkeit, weil sie befürchtete, ähnlich wie im französischen Haiti von der schwarzen Bevölkerungsmehrheit außer Landes gejagt zu werden. Die legale Abschaffung der Unterschiede zwischen den Kasten, der Sklaverei und des Sklavenhandels sowie der Zwangsarbeit der Indianer scheint auf den ersten Blick einen deutlichen Bruch mit den sozialen und Arbeitsverhältnissen der kolonialen Periode darzustellen. Als aber das 19. Jahrhundert voranschritt, versuchten die neuen Nationalregierungen die frühere, progressive Gesetzgebung zurückzunehmen. Sie arbeiteten mit den Großgrundbesitzern zusammen, ja: stammten zum großen Teil selbst aus dieser Schicht. Dies war vor allem dann von Bedeutung, wenn es um die Erarbeitung neuer Modalitäten ging, um sich Arbeitskraft anzueignen, die nicht weniger ausbeuterisch als die alten Formen waren. In dieser Beibehaltung der Grundstrukturen der kolonialen Gesellschaft kann man klar den anti-revolutionären Charakter der sogenannten „Unabhängigkeitsrevolutionen“ erblicken. Die Politiken der neuen lateinamerikanischen Staaten wiesen einen äußerst niedrigen Grad an Volksbeteiligung auf, sie hatten kaum Autonomie von den Interessen lokaler Eliten und eine sehr geringe Fähigkeit, im internationalen Staatensystem zu konkurrieren. Die Unfähigkeit der spanisch-amerikanischen Nationen,

[17] Cf. Konetzke 1960: 365–390.

effizient organisierte, zentralisierte Nationalstaaten zu schaffen, bis weit über ein halbes Jahrhundert nach der Unabhängigkeit hinaus, ist eines der Unterscheidungsmerkmale der Geschichte der Region und ein direktes Erbe des Charakters der Unabhängigkeitskämpfe. Ein anderes Erbe ist die Militarisierung der spanisch-amerikanischen Gesellschaft und Politik, eine Militarisierung, die das Emporkommen nicht nur der Institution widerspiegelt, die die Kriege gegen Spanien gewann, sondern zugleich der einzigen Institution, die die immer noch aufsässigen Massen kontrollieren konnte. Dieses Kontrollmittel wirkte sehr effizient, denn es sollte ein weiteres Jahrhundert dauern, bis Spanisch-Amerika in der großen mexikanischen Revolution erneut Volksaufstände registrierte, die in ihrer Tiefe und Reichweite denen zwischen 1810 und 1825 vergleichbar sein sollten. Die Oligarchen an der Macht scheinen ihr neues Haus besser bestellt zu haben, als sie selbst es ahnten.

Aus den Ruinen der alten, kolonialen erstand nur sehr allmählich eine neue, tragfähige Ordnung. Zentrifugale Tendenzen und politische Instabilität verhinderten vorerst eine kontinuierliche Entwicklung; die in den Unabhängigkeitskriegen entfesselte Gewalt konnte nicht mehr zurückgebunden werden; sie sollte zu einem Charakteristikum vieler lateinamerikanischer Gesellschaften werden. Bolívars großer Traum eines einigen, unabhängigen, nach innen und außen gefestigten Lateinamerika sollte sich nicht realisieren, die hehren Ideale von Freiheit und Gleichheit blieben rhetorische Fassade. Noch zu seinen Lebzeiten musste der Befreier erfahren, dass seine Vorstellungen von nationaler und kontinentaler Einheit und Zusammenarbeit in einer Flut von Gewalt und Habgier untergingen. Gabriel García Márquez legt in seinem Roman „Der General in seinem Labyrinth“ dem sterbenden Bolívar Worte in den Mund, die als offene Frage gewissermaßen den Aufbruch Lateinamerikas in die Unabhängigkeit widerspiegeln. Dem Dichter zufolge lauteten die letzten Worte Bolívars vor seinem Tod: „Wie werde ich aus diesem Labyrinth herausfinden!“[18]

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[18] García Márquez 1989.

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The End of the Portuguese Colonial Empire

David Schriffl

1 The Making of an Empire

To understand the end of the Portuguese Overseas Empire it is necessary to say a few words about its creation and development. It is especially necessary to emphasize the role it played for the Portuguese people and Portuguese politics.

Like other empires, also the Portuguese one lived through several clearly distinguishable phases throughout the centuries. Its origins date back to the fifteenth century, when Prince Henry, called "the seafarer" even though he never took part in the big expeditions, began to explore the African coast and wider areas in the Atlantic Ocean. Soon Portuguese strongholds and commercial bases were built and made operational. This marks an important fact: These endeavours were commercial enterprises. To get hold of first territories overseas like the archipelagos of Madeira or the Azores meant commercial success. Agricultural goods like, sugar cane, wine and fruits were the result of the efforts to create a financial surplus. The explorations led further southwards, which resulted in new bases on the African coast. The big goal for the Portuguese was to find a seaway to India. This was important to break the Arabian/Italian monopoly on land-based trade with Asian spices for Europe's markets. Finally, Vasco da Gama achieved this goal. In doing so

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Portuguese vessels sailed increasingly far to the West. In 1500, more or less as a side effect in the quest for Indian trade, Pedro Cabral "discovered" Brazil.

Saying this the main geographical areas are mentioned where Portuguese activities led to trade, commerce and with time military presence to safeguard this trade. First merely small outposts alongside the coastlines were built, only with time outright colonies were organised. Leaving out Madeira and the Azores, connected to mainland Portugal very early in history, the Portuguese imperial space spanned from Macau in East Asia, over East Timor, the Estado da India with Goa, Mozambique in East Africa, Angola, the Cap Verdes and Guinea in West Africa to Brazil on the South American continent. At first, spice trade was the defining feature for the Portuguese Empire. The African outposts had to secure these trade routes. The Portuguese reacted quickly and decisive when they saw a threat to this network. The violent occupation of an Austrian trade post in the Delagoa Bay in East Africa in the late eighteenth century is a late but illustrative example. At this time, the Portuguese could only exert such violent measures against smaller naval powers like Habsburg, since the British and the Dutch had challenged if not shattered their naval supremacy already before.

Portugal was driven out of Asia in principal and its Empire therefore entered another phase. Brazil became more important economically and politically. Africa became the source for slave trade to Brazil in the so-called "Atlantic triangle". These phases can be distinguished also by the intensity of settlement and control over inland areas. The Portuguese progressed over the centuries—very slowly—from only securing outposts on islands or the coastline to more direct control over inland areas. More settlers went to live overseas creating new economies, markets and societies. In the Portuguese case due to the small size of the metropolitan country, the numbers were always smaller than in other Empires. One of the results was the necessity to allow marriages with indigenous people to secure a sufficient population overseas. This is contrasting clearly for example with the settlements of the British in North America.

Brazil became Portugal's most important colony due to its size, economy and market. During the Napoleonic menace, it was even the hideout for the Portuguese court. It is unique, that the periphery of an Empire for some time became its centre. Moreover, economists of the early nineteenth century regarded Brazil as more valuable than the Portuguese motherland. This importance and a growing self-confidence in the Brazilian society contributed to the countries decision for independence in 1822. Interestingly the "divorce" was a less troublesome than in other cases. The Portuguese King urged his son to make the country independent under his rule if it was necessary to secure it for monarchical rule and the house of Bragança. Military conflict after the declaration of independence was very limited and after a few years Portugal accepted the new facts. However, if the loss of many East-Asian trade posts was a first setback for the Portuguese Empire in centuries before, the loss of Brazil can be seen as a beginning of its definite decline even though it lasted 150 years more.

2 The "African" Empire and Its Critics at the International Level

One of the outcomes was an increased focus on Africa. Nevertheless, this did not lead immediately to intensified settlement efforts or effective control over bigger areas in the hinterland of the remaining colonies. Only the European race for the occupation of Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century lead to renewed activity by Portugal. In this phase, the country even came into conflict with another Empire of that time and its oldest ally at the same time, Britain. The British wanted to secure a passage of colonial territory from North to South in East Africa, the Portuguese wanted to connect the West (Angola) and the East (Mozambique) of its colonies. Nationalistic feelings were hard to control already. The new national anthem included the sentence "Contra os Britões marchar, marchar!" which translates "Against the British, to march, to march!" Later the text was changed to "Contra os canhões marchar, marchar!" which replaced the British by "cannons" and is sung like this until today.

Only the fact, that Portugal owed its status as a colonial power, as an "Empire of second order" to its alliance with Britain prevented more decisive action of the Portuguese government against the British plans.

But even like that, in the end of the nineteenth century on the height of European colonial fever, Portuguese colonial rule often was ephemeral. Even though the monarchy used the imperial discourse to strengthen its own ideological base, in fact the begin of effective rule over vast territories overseas which were nominally under Portuguese control since centuries happened around 1913–1915.[1] At this time the monarchy was overthrown already, it had ended in 1910 giving way for a time of instability. The Republic carried on effectively an imperial policy. The Empire was obviously not directly connected with the way the state was organised. Being and representing an Empire had deeper roots in the consciousness of the elites and partly the population than the monarchy. It was regarded as "holy" and a central part of national identity.[2] This—of course—was also the case in other countries. In the case of Portugal, monarchy, republic and dictatorship equally used the strong will to keep the overseas territories Portuguese to legitimize themselves.

The international discourse on European ownership of colonial territories changed drastically during the twentieth century. Portugal faced accusations regarding its conduct of colonial affairs throughout the century, not only after WWII. Already in 1925, high functionaries had to defend Portugal's overseas policy before the League of Nations against allegations that it would use methods similar to slavery. It argued that while misconduct might happen, that the Portuguese laws of course would not allow outright slavery.[3] With the new discourse, suddenly a justification was needed to defend the possession of such

[1] Abele (2017).

[2] Bernecker and Pietschmann (2012): 283.

[3] Freire de Andrade (1925): 3-15.Freire de Andrade, A. 1925. Trabalho Indígena e as Colónias Portuguesas. Boletim da Agência Geral das Colónias 1 (3 September): 3-15.

territories including their indigenous population. According to those changes, Portugal gradually adapted the respective legal regulations. 1926 when the military government seized power "Statute on Natives" was implemented. It made a distinction between "Natives" and "Civilised". The latter could reach this status by learning to read and write, ending nomadism and attending church services.[4] In 1950, only 30,000 people in Angola and about 4000 in Mozambique had the status of a "Civilised" showing the slow progress that was made, even though some did not apply for the status even though they would have fit in the definition due to higher taxes to be paid by such individuals.[5] Like other states at the time Portugal intentionally ended officially racist models of governing native people. The pure might to control oversea territories was replaced by a civilising mission, which should morally legitimate the European presence.

The so called "Colonial Act" of 1930—enacted already during the military dictatorship with Salazar as the minister for colonial affairs—attempted to set a single base for the relations between the colonies and the metropolis. Portugal declared its nature as a colonial power solemnly and programmatically. The control over colonial territories was defined as a feature of the Portuguese nation and its historical mission.[6] Now its possessions were called "Imperio Colonial Português".[7]

Even though the number of Portuguese settlers was relatively small and the population of mainland Portugal was quite indifferent regarding the colonies, the colonial question was ubiquitous in the political sphere and stayed like that for a long time.[8] The lack of interest in the problems of maintaining colonies beyond the big patriotic gesture was lamented also by members of the political elite. The minister of the Overseas Provinces Adriano Moreira stated in 1962: "I have always regretted the indifference shown by many of our best citizens in the matter of overseas problems, particularly during those few decades when the troubles now assailing us were brewing."[9]

The constitution of the "New State" of Salazar, issued in 1933, named all the colonies as integral parts of Portugal never to be given up.

Nevertheless, the Second World War and the after war-period internationally brought an end to the concept of rightfulness of colonial rule. The disintegration of respectively the changes in the colonial empires of Britain and France were clear signs in that respect. Portugal went the other way. In 1951, the Colonial Act became a part of the constitution to underline its importance. Until the mid-1950s, the possession of colonies respectively "overseas-territories" as a part of the Portuguese "national character" was beyond controversy also within the whole opposition. Groups critical of the regime even argued, that

[4] Abele (2017): 52.

[5] de Oliveira Marques (1972): 228f.

[6] Friedrich (2016): 70.

[7] Friedrich (2016): 162.

[8] Abele (2017): 47f.

[9] Moreira (1962): 3.Moreira, Adriano. 1962. *Revision*. Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar.

Portugal only could morally ask for being a colonial power if it ceased to be a dictatorship.[10]

It's also interesting to see, that only after 1945 the numbers of Portuguese settlers significantly rose in Africa. This increased number matched the declaratory laws that sought to tighten the bonds between metropolis and colonies more and more according to the rising threats for this overseas rule. The number of settlers rose to 450,000 in 1960. Also in Angola, the bigger numbers became evident: from 172,500 in 1961 to 335,000 in 1974.[11] Also and especially during the colonial wars the centre enforced white settlements to strengthen the connection with the colonial periphery. But nowhere the number of white settlers surpassed 5% of the population.[12] Lisbon did not want to give up its rule but at least the wording changed in 1953 to adapt gradually to the changes on the international stage. With the "Law on the organisation of the oversea territories" the term "colonial" was put aside. Oversea territories should no longer be colonies, which implied a distinction between the self and the other. Now those areas were by law integral parts of the Portuguese motherland, just more or less coincidentally on other continents.[13] Nevertheless, despite those efforts also after 1945 the Portuguese Empire was no unified customs and economic area.

The gradually increasing strength of African and other independence movements made a steady adaptation of the Portuguese colonial ideology necessary. The new punchline was that the Portuguese would have a special relationship with the indigenous populations, less coined by racism than other colonial powers. Until today, this new concept is often cited and mentioned. We can detect an "Africanisation" of Portugal in the discourse of this time.[14] The so-called "Luso-Tropicalismo" painted an image of a multi-racial society that most likely was more dreaming than the reality.

We can get an impression of how this concept appeared for the outside world reading a report by an Austrian diplomat dating from 1955. The report describes the conditions in the Portuguese colonies. It states, that one had to factor, that Portugal had always tried to bond the populations of its overseas territories "on the one hand by an extensive racial tolerance (...) and on the other hand, especially on the African continent, to keep the local population immune to harmful foreign influences, by a very modestly and hesitantly executed education (schools). That way, Portugal still today is probably one of the very few European states, which lives with the populations of its overseas possessions in the best agreement and which has achieved, that every Angolan negroe or member of tribes populating

[10] Abele (2017): 66.

[11] Abele (2017): 79; See also Pimenta (2008): 243, 253, and 264, here cited after Ramos (2010): 685.

[12] Bernecker and Pietschmann (2012): 287.

[13] Friedrich (2016): 291.

[14] Abele (2017): 59.

Mozambique or Guinea is first and foremost a staunch Portuguese and feels like an equal member of a significant nation, even if he is neither able to read or write."[15]

Portugal was, compared to other colonial powers, relatively poor and human resources were scarcer since the motherland had a limited population. It might seem paradoxical but these limitations could be a part of the explanation, why Portugal was able to maintain its colonies for much longer, then other and bigger colonial powers. The limited number of settlers and functionaries led to the necessity for certain forms of self-administration to secure Portuguese rule. A second factor was the small number of indigenous people who were able to read and write. This lead to bigger difficulties for the new political movements, including those fighting for independence, to gain ground within the local population. The progress in terms of education and literacy was almost invisible. In 1969, an Austrian diplomat reported of primary schools in Portuguese Africa full of blacks whereas in middle schools they would only represent only 1–2% of the pupils.[16] Even though educational programmes expanded during the war in an effort of making the slogan of modernization more credible, the number stayed quite low. In the late 1960s the rate of illiteracy was over 90% in Guinea, Mozambique and Angola (in 1950 almost 100% respectively), over 80% in São Tomé and over 70% in Cape Verde. In Angola and Mozambique hundreds of thousands if not millions had neither contact to Portuguese culture nor could they speak the language of the Empire.[17] It might have been a tactic of the regime to keep the major part of the population illiterate or at least away from higher education to bar them from political influence, since this method seemed to have worked in Portugal proper too over the decades.

Nevertheless, slowly, an increasing instability marked the Portuguese colonies since the international developments in combination with the independence movements also had an influence on African soil. The regime feared to lose control more and more in the oversea territories. A clear sign is the beginning of the activities of the Portuguese State and Secret Police PIDE in the colonies since 1953. Now this institution opened agencies also in Africa and in other places overseas. The agents of the state already feared the beginning of some kind of war there as early as the early 1950s.

To follow the ongoing changes in the diction on the international stage, especially in the UN, in 1961 the "Statute on Natives" was abolished. All inhabitants of the oversea territories should be regarded now as Portuguese no matter which lifestyle they followed or which kind of education they had. The factual differences between black and white Africans remained. Forced labour was still in use after this point even though officially it had been abolished already in the 1930s, the Colonial Act of 1930 still determined that the

[15] ÖStA/AdR, BKA-AA, Gr.Zl. 322.780-Pol/55, Zl. 322.780-Pol/55. Reise des Staatspräsidenten nach den überseeischen port. Territorien Guiné, Cabo Verde und Madeira. Fischer an Figl vom 31.5.1955, do. Zl. 7-Pol/55.

[16] ÖStA/AdR, BMfAA, Gr.Zl. 154.869-Pol/69, Zl. 154.869-Pol/69. Eindrücke aus Angola und Moçambique. Gohn an Waldheim vom 18.3.1969, do. Zl. 2-Pol/69.

[17] de Oliveira Marques (1972): 257.

state could force the local population to work.[18] In 1959 Portugal ratified a convention of the International Labour Organization abolishing forced labour but under different labels black Africans have been forced to work until the collapse of the regime. Besides the principle stance, the design of the economies of the colonies facilitated and supported monopolies in the motherland, which slowed down the modernisation.

3 Waging War in Africa

The factual colonial policy together with international developments on decolonisation or the Bandung-Conference were the impulses for the foundation of associations in the African colonies demanding more independence. The major part of these associations was oriented to the political left. Reason for this were not only international politics but also the biographies of many of the protagonists. A large part of them had studied in Portugal and met the opposition there, led by the Communist Party. Their followers were concentrated in the urban areas of the colonies.

The beginning uprising became stronger only gradually also as a reaction to the way the Portuguese dealt with it because from the very beginning the Portuguese used extreme repression as means to quell the rebellions. In 1960, a revolt of agricultural workers against forced cultivation of cotton was ended besides other weapons with napalm. A first—if minimal—territorial loss of 4.5 ha in Africa was the military seizure of the small fortress of São João Baptista d'Ajudá, a former slave trading post, in today's Benin by armed forces of the new the state of Dahomey. The fate of this tiny place set the script for the big scale war. The few Portuguese did surrender but only after their commander set the building on fire.[19] Portugal accepted the loss only in 1975, but that is a look to far into the future development at this point. In early 1961 Angolan independence-fighters attacked public infrastructure in Luanda. The revenge of white settlers and militias left 50,000 Blacks dead. The image of a society without racial discrimination became absurd. In the same year, the secret police reported back from Lourenço Marques (Maputo/Mozambique) that "the fight against the White has begun".[20]

In addition, the white settlers were not fully content. They did not have a big share in colonial administration because almost all functionaries came from Portugal proper. Even signs of a white independence movement became visible, but of course, those never challenged the Portuguese control of its colonies. Some even thought of the beginning of open hostilities as a luck for the regime since now a closing of ranks through all parts of society to defend the colonies began. Nevertheless, this sentiment weakened when it

[18] Friedrich (2016): 163.

[19] de Oliveira Marques (1972): 238.

[20] Abele (2017): 73.

became clear, that a pacification would not be possible easily.[21] Already in 1961, a failed putsch by military officials led by the minister of defence Botelho Moniz against Salazar and his colonial policy took place.

Portugal accessed the United Nations in 1955. However, especially in this forum its imperial policy became indefensible. The UN defined the colonies as dependent territories, which should be granted independence. A respective resolution of the General Assembly was passed in 1961 after the mentioned massacres with great majority. In the following years, several similar resolutions were successful in the General Assembly and the Security Council. Portugal rejected them as an interference in internal affairs. It tried to picture its rule in Africa as completely different from Britain, France or Belgium. Salazar himself explained Portugal's position in his "Declaration on Overseas Policy". According to that Portugal was an African nation and Angola and Mozambique existed only through Portugal. The territories were "real states" and politically integrated.[22] This strategy brought little success. In Portugal, a mood of being under siege became even more apparent when the conflict with India escalated. The "Estado da India" was the little rest, Portugal had been able to preserve of its possessions in India. In the twentieth century, it only consisted of the city of Goa and few little spots including Damao and Diu. Encouraged by the UN and not inhibited by countries as the USA, India occupied those territories in the end of 1961 by military means. In the end of 1965, the UN even imposed a trade- and weapons-embargo against Portugal. In fact, those embargos were worthless. The West undermined them and did not want to treat its strategically important NATO-ally too harshly even though it could not support the Portuguese overseas policy.[23]

An important asset in that respect were the Azores. The US, the British and France used these islands as an important stopover for military transatlantic flights and as a rocket base during the Cold War. After President Kennedy's death Lisbon used the need for the US to renew the contract regarding the base on the Archipelago to bar US-critisism.[24] Portugal on the other hand saw its alliances—militarily and economic ones—mainly as tools to secure its ongoing presence in Africa. On the one hand, Portugal regarded itself rooted in the West with its anti-communism. One the other hand it felt abandoned by its allies left alone in Africa to fight a war of West against East. This because Portuguese politics regarded the African independence movements mainly as destabilising enterprises which would be inspired by foreign communist forces, not as genuinely African movements. Portugal profited from being embedded in NATO and EFTA. But at the same time it did not want

[21] Abele (2017): 85.

[22] de Oliveira Salazar, Antonio (1963). Declaration on Overseas Policy. Lisbon.

[23] Friedrich (2016): 293; Even though Austria was no member of NATO her foreign ministry tried to facilitate the export of firearms to Portugal despite the embargo. Müller, Stefan, Adamantios Skordos and David Schriffl. 2016. Die Beziehungen Österreichs zu den Diktaturen Südeuropas nach 1945: Spanien, Portugal, Griechenland. Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau, 177f.

[24] Gallagher (1983): 177.

to subjugate itself to a European economic system and saw itself—at least officially—as a European and an African country at the same time.

In June 1962, Eduardo Mondlane founded in Tanzania a coalition of Mozambican freedom fighters named FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique/Mozambique Liberation Front). He had been a functionary of the UN and led the FRELIMO until he was murdered in 1969. In Guinea Amilcar Cabral was the head of the PAIGC (Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde/African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde), the respective movement for Guinea and Cabo Verde. PAIGC officially declared war on Portugal in 1963, FRELIMO in September 1964.

Since 1964 the latest, war was present in all Portuguese colonies in Africa. The number of fighters stayed relatively low. One reason for this fact were the difficulties to mobilize a rural population with a low literacy rate. In Angola the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola/People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and the UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola/National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) had about 18,000 combatants, in Mozambique the FRELIMO 10–15,000 and in Guinea and Cabo Verde the PAIGC together 10,000 fighters under arms.[25] Another reason was the tribal structure of the territories which was a hindrance for the independent movements who fought for an independent coherent nation. Such a nation did not exist yet. The Portuguese tried to exploit conflicts between the different tribes to their advantage. It seems ironic, that the Portuguese often found better allies in Muslim tribes like the Fula in Guinea-Bissau and the Makua in Mozambique because of their conservative social structure. This went so far, that Portugal even flew Muslim pilgrims to Mecca and built mosques in Guinea-Bissau in exchange for loyalty of local chiefs. Africans educated by Catholic missionaries more often joined the new African nationalists.[26]

Lisbon regarded it as one single war, brought from the outside into Portuguese territory. The enemies would be mainly communist terrorists supplied by foreign countries. True about this assessment was, that the independence movements could maintain bases in neighbouring countries for training, supply and tactical retreat, which made them much more successful as they would have been without these features. Especially in Guinea, the Portuguese presence soon was driven out of many parts of the country. Only in the cities the Portuguese could withstand, the jungle could not be recaptured from the rebels during the complete long-lasting war. Often so called "search and destroy"-missions were flown with helicopters during which the Portuguese tried to break any resistance with bombs and napalm in the jungle.[27]

In addition, there the support from the neighbours was important. Cabrals PAIGC received aid from Sekou Tourés Guinea. In Mozambique, the FRELIMO also got help from Zambia but was only able to occupy parts of the north of the country. Since 1966, the

[25] Abele (2017): 69 and 197f.

[26] Gallagher (1983): 177.

[27] Abele (2017): 81.

war there was fought mainly with landmines, ambushes and propaganda. In addition, this kind of warfare bound many resources in terms of money and personnel on the Portuguese side. In Angola, the more moderate FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola/ National Liberation Front of Angola) received US-support for some years and from the Congo. The Marxist MPLA and the UNITA (an FNLA spin-off) got help from Zambia.

The fight did not only wage in the jungle but also on the green table. The new states—only in the "African year" of 1960 18 former colonies became independent of other European powers—represented a growing lobby within the UN working for the independence of other colonies, including the Portuguese ones. Portugal i.e. the Salazar-regime often stood quite alone against this phalanx in the UN. Regarding its interior politics, Lisbon could rely on two factors: Firstly, the defence of the colonies was in principle uncontested also within the moderate opposition and secondly the Portuguese somehow became used to the long war despite the many sacrifices it brought.

Despite Salazar's personal stubbornness in the colonial question and his declaration, since 1963—the beginning of the military conflict in Guinea—the official Portuguese stance at the UN became a bit more flexible. From now on Lisbon presented home rule as a possibility in a distant future. Already before, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had stated internally, that the colonies would move towards autonomy or even independence despite the military efforts by the regime. Lisbon also more and more used the topic of modernisation of the colonies and their economies not to leave all promises for an emancipation of the black population open for rebel groups. Besides that within the regime two different factions did not argue whether Portugal should have colonies or not. The question was only, if a peaceful and moderate stance would be the better way to ensure their further existence.[28]

The Portuguese paternalistic argument was as follows: Since the local population would not be mature enough, a continued (white) Portuguese presence would be necessary. This topos regarding the colonial question was quite popular also outside Portugal at the time. An example shows that this view was still widespread in Europe even in countries without the need to justify a military presence overseas.

It found supporters for example in Austria, even in the socialist media. In a leading article regarding the situation in the Congo, the Socialist *Arbeiter-Zeitung* ("Workers' Newspaper") used similar phrases, even though it made skilful semantic changes when it announced on its front page: "Secondly the new politicians in the Congo are like the children." To demarcate from the conservatives immediately the paper followed up: "It is an old reactionary phrase, that the African peoples are not "mature" enough for independence yet. The Congo-negroes are "mature", they just do not have any experience. (...) The savages nevertheless stay savage, even if You declare them independent overnight. (...) These politicians will need several months or maybe even several years to make up for

[28] Abele (2017): 125f.

what the Belgian colonialists failed to do on them. (...) The children have to grow up quicker, the savages have to civilise themselves quicker than up to now."[29]

But it was not about children and parents anymore, it was about waging a war of independence.

None of the sides could prevail militarily in decisive manner; especially since 1966, a military stalemate was recognizable. The regime gradually adapted its position ideologically and verbally to the ubiquitous criticism. Even though the right to possess oversea territories in Africa was not questioned, a new approach was formulated. Now reforms within the colonies should lead to an end of the revolt instead of a bitterly fought war. The living-standard and the right of the local population to take part in the decision-making should be improved. The most prominent advocate of this new policy was the later Prime minister Marcelo Caetano. Another voice of this political spectrum wrote in 1965: "Everything speaks in favor of Portugal (history, mission, reason etc.). It would be tragic, if we would want to stay [in Africa] by the only means that does not speak for us—violence!"[30]

4 A War of Attrition

Waging the war, Vietnam and Algeria served as negative examples. The Portuguese actively tried to adapt themselves to the guerrilla-tactics of the rebels. The training of the soldiers was changed to suit the situation better.[31] Nevertheless, morals got worse increasingly quick within the Portuguese military by the late 1960s. The army mainly consisted of conscripts. The length of the military service was increased from 18 months to 4 years for navy and air force and from 2 to 4 years in the army. The maximum conscription age was increased to 40.[32] Frustration grew in an army, which got its replacements more and more from rural areas. In the 1960s, many Portuguese emigrated to avoid being conscripted.[33] Therefore, the population shrank despite a high fertility rate. Between 1958 and 1974 1.5 million Portuguese left the country of about 8 million inhabitants. The psychological state is well illustrated by the numbers of deserted recruits (who just did not show up for the medical examination): In 1961 11.6% deserted, 1965 to 1968 about 19% and 1972 already 21%. At the end of the war a fifth of the conscripts absconded from the army. The numbers in the field increased steadily. At the end of 1962 51,000 soldiers fought in the oversea territories, 1965 almost 100,000 and 1970 already 150,000. Put in relation with the population of the motherland at the end of the war Portugal had five times the number of soldiers in Africa than the USA in Vietnam (even though the mortality rate was much lower

[29] "Das Tohuwabohu im Kongo" Arbeiterzeitung vom 10.8.1960, 1f.

[30] Mello (1962): 116.

[31] Cf. Bacelar (2000).

[32] Abele (2017): 129f.

[33] Prutsch (2012): 90.

than in the US Army).[34,35] Military spending let the public debt explode. It grew by the factor 12 between 1961 and 1966.

The highest military ranks mostly stayed loyal to the regime. But the middle ranks turned to inner, later open opposition. The army became more and more important due to the increasing war effort. At the same time, it became more and more a place of opposition against the hard-headed colonial policy of the regime. The structures of power changed because of and already during the war, they were not destroyed in a single revolutionary act. The regime slowly eroded from within.

The Portuguese forces outnumbered their opponents in the field. 1974 in Guinea 58,000 Portuguese fought against 6000 rebels, in Mozambique 60,000 against 10,000 and in Angola 70,000 against 6000.[36] But even like that the war could not be won. Since 1966 not only the wording of the metropolitan politics was "Africanised" but also the army. Now Blacks were recruited too. These troops helped securing the supply lines, cost less money but had a better knowledge of the terrain. They also served in special forces units with high casualties. Furthermore, these men could be presented by the regime as proof of the loyalty of the black population for the Portuguese state. Soon, half of the colonial army was black.[37] In 1974 in Angola 30,000 of 70,000 Portuguese soldiers were black, in 1973 in Mozambique even more than half, 40,000 Africans of 60,000 soldiers.[38]

To secure funds for the war and modernize the colonies at the same time the markets of the oversea territories were gradually opened for foreign investment. This led to the paradox situation, that in times of the UN trade-embargo against Portugal foreign direct investments in the colonial economy increased. In Angola it was in 1967 30 times higher than 1959.[39] Nevertheless, besides generating some income for the state, most of the profit of the African colonies went abroad to the USA, West Germany and South Africa, not to underdeveloped Portugal. This led to increased discontent within the military, when nationalist officers saw themselves just as useful tools to secure foreign profits by risking their own lives in the jungle.[40] Between 1961 and 1967, investments were ten times higher than in the two decades before. We can see here a similar development as with the numbers of settlers. During the war the development intensified—in 1970 17.3% of Angola's population were white settlers despite or because of the war.[41] The economy profited of some kind of war-conjuncture for raw material industries, mining and building infrastructure. The Portuguese GNP grew between 1960 and 1973 7.4% per year. A growing

[34] Ramos (2010): 684.

[35] Gallagher (1983): 183.

[36] Ramos (2010): 683; Abele, 197f.

[37] Cann (1998): here cited after Ramos (2010): 683.

[38] Friedrich 2016: 294.

[39] Friedrich (2016): 293.

[40] Gallagher (1983): 186.

[41] Ramos (2010): 684; Ribeiro de Meneses (2010): 554.

economy needed skilled workers, which resulted in the foundation of technical university institutes in Angola and Mozambique. In addition, in the Portuguese motherland in the 1960s, direct investments grew and the tourism became significant for the economy. However, the metropolitan economy more and more dissociated itself from the one in the colonies. Exchange with European and other partners became increasingly important. Two different opinions on this problem were aired: One side saw Portugal's independence only secured by its oversea territories as an economic backyard. The others preferred to turn the focus to Western Europe and its increasing economic integration. The latter gained more and more ground the longer the war lasted. In 1935, Salazar stated "We are foremost an Atlantic Power, bound to Spain by natural position, politically and economically (...) orientated towards the sea (...)."[42]

Nevertheless, in 1973, when a free trade agreement came into force, already 48% of Portugal's exports went to EEC-countries. Only 15% went to the colonies, which still not were integrated with the motherland in a customs and currency union.[43] The balancing act between European integration and African mission became increasingly impossible. The colonies were a source of income for Portugal and continued to be one also during the war. But while they were the biggest source for Lisbon in terms of foreign exchange until 1967, the remittances of emigres surpassed the colonies in this respect. In 1973 the colonies had become an almost negligible factor for the country's income in foreign currencies in comparison to those other sources.[44] One outcome of these processes was the rise of living standards and changes in the social structure of the country. A few numbers show nevertheless which burden the colonial war was for the state's finances: During the 1960s 50% of the public budget, 85% of the colonial budget (which constituted 26% of Portugal's public budget) or 8% of the GNP were spent on the military. The manning of the war effort represented 6% of Portugal's total labor force.[45] These numbers come from the twentieth century but remind us of the budget of a pre-modern state. No surprise, that economists identify the cost of the colonial war as the major weakness for the Portuguese economy.[46] The war effort increased public spending and even foreign investment in the colonies. Nevertheless, without its costs remittances from emigrés and a higher tax revenue could have been used for civil aspects.

[42] Friedrich (2016): 155.
[43] Ramos (2010): 687.
[44] Freire Costa (2016): 313.
[45] Freire Costa (2016): 314.
[46] Freire Costa (2016): 312.

5 New Head, Different Course?

The Portuguese stance i.e. the lack of any change in this stance over decades was closely linked to the person of Prime Minister Antonio Salazar. He by the way never visited a Portuguese oversea territory. When the end of his role in the political arena became soon to expect due to his age and increasingly bad health in the mid-1960s, many expected a change in the colonial policy because of the change of the head of government. When Marcelo Caetano took over as Prime Minister in 1968 he gave reason for hope not only in that respect since he initiated first measures for more democracy and limited censorship. Furthermore, he was one of the first who regarded political solutions for the colonial problem as necessary and possible already in the early 1960s. By allowing two oppositional electoral lists and applying more openness in the political discourse in general during the election campaign of 1969, he tried to reach some kind of referendum on the colonial question. The parliament remained a stronghold of the ruling party but an inner opposition became visible. In 1970, this opposition demanded the complete end of censorship, full liberal rights and the release of political prisoners. Even though all demands were denied, opposing thoughts gained much profile in the political spectrum.

Caetano also travelled through the colonies. However, despite his verbal commitments, he continued Salazar's policy regarding the ongoing war. Moreover, in 1970 he started major military offensives in Mozambique (Operation Gordian Knot under general Arriaga) and Angola.[47] Despite certain successes in the beginning, the military standoff continued. In Angola, the Portuguese even lost the air-superiority. In 1972—after 10 years of fighting—Caetano publicly even denied the very existence of a real war and a serious threat to the Portuguese sovereignty in Africa. In the early 1970s general Spinola, who commanded troops in Portuguese Guinea, suggested to Caetano to negotiate with the local independence movement PAIGC. The Prime Minister refused the initiative. His argument to do so reminded of Salazar. Caetano said he would prefer to lose in honour to negotiate with terrorists. In 1971, a change in the constitution wanted to provide more room to manoeuvre for the colonies and more competences for the local administration. In addition, the law allowed calling those territories "states". Nevertheless, these measures of mainly symbolic character were not suited to satisfy any of the conflicting parties. For the conservative forces, it looked like accepting defeat, for the progressive parts of the political spectrum the changes were just shallow words. In the following year, the re-installation of the conservative President Americo Tomás by an election body instead of a popular vote made clear, that the regime became more rigid again. Portugal under Caetano even implemented a Vietnam-like extension of the war, when it began to bombard FRELIMO-bases in Sambia, outside of its colonial possessions.

[47] Gallagher (1983): 178.

6 Erosion from Within and the End of an Empire

Open protest against the Portuguese colonial policy or the very existence of Portuguese oversea territories became effective only in the 1970s. Progressive catholic circles aired such views openly only since the end of 1972, Socialists completely open only since more or less during the founding of the Socialist Party in 1973. Similarly, late was the liberal opposition. That means, that only in 1973 the whole opposition found itself unified demanding the independence of the colonies. This unity was one reason, why the regime rapidly got weaker. The second was the failure of the government even to develop a reasonably and credible vision for the future of the oversea territories. It did not help, when the international press reported a massacre committed in December 1972 by Portuguese troops in Wiriyamu, Mozambique with 400 people killed shortly before an official visit of Caetano in London in 1973.[48] The trip became a diplomatic disaster.[49]

At this point, the Socialists under Mario Soares and the Communists already demanded a democratic government, the end of the war and the independence of the African colonies in jointly published communiqués. In fall 1973, a group of officers called the "Movement of Captains" protested against governmental policies. Firstly, changes in the military service affecting their careers were the reason. Soon, regarding the colonies also them demanded at least a political alternative to the war. The reasons for the dissatisfaction of those middle and lower ranks had deeper roots. Over decades the highest ranking officers were chosen because of their loyalty, not because of their effectiveness. The regime actively mingled them with business circles in the partly monopolistic economy to keep them loyal. The result were very poorly paid low ranking officers and sometimes extremely wealthy generals and admirals.[50] The conservative forces lost their sovereignty over the military. In December 1973, members of those right-wing military officers staged a coup d'état. In addition, the oil-shock in the fall of 1973 and subsequent strikes because of the galloping inflation in the beginning of 1974 shattered the regime severely.

The declaration of independence by Guinea-Bissau on 24 September 1973 was symbolically devastating for Caetano's government. This was even more the case since the UN General Assembly recognized it in early November of the same year. The Empire had become unsustainable. More and more the white settlers in Africa felt under threat. During winter 1973/74 plans for a takeover of power in Lisbon were made. Many scholars are convinced, that the later successful actions to change the situation did not stem from moral high ground or sympathies for the movements of independence. The simple wish to evade an open defeat might have been more important. In February 1974, the regime allowed general Spinola to publish his book "Portugal and the Future" in which he called the war

[48] The Times, July 10 1973. Portuguese massacre reported by priests.

[49] Letria, Joaquim (2013). A peripatética visita de Caetano a Londres. Visão História (20) Os últimos Meses do Estado Novo: 52-55.

[50] Gallagher (1983): 181.

senseless. It had a deep impact on the public opinion. All critics of the regime, including those within the military felt their position confirmed. In the beginning of 1974, the "Movement of the Captains" started to call itself "Movement of the Armed Forces", was well organised and present as well in Portugal proper as in all colonies. As early as in March 1974, this movement negotiated with general Spinola the political future of the country. The program of April 20 1974 demanded free elections, the end of censorship and the dissolution of the political police. Nevertheless, the answer to the colonial problem was rather vague—a "political solution" should be found.

On April 25, the putsch of the "Movement of the Armed Forces", the so-called "Carnation Revolution" was successful with Spinola's consent who knew of the plan.

Caetano assigned him as head of the government. He did so after having refused before to hand over power to Captain Salgueiro Maia of the MFA. Like that he wanted to secure, that power would not be "in the hands of the mob".[51] The population stood behind the revolution firmly. In Portugal proper, several governments under military leadership alternated while not much changed in the colonies. The "Junta of National Salvation", which represented the military and kept the power in her hands, even had proclaimed to guarantee "the survival of the nation on all continents".[52]

Nevertheless, the "Movement of the Armed Forces" independently organised cease-fires in the colonies and therefore became the major factor in the process of decolonization. In the end of July 1974, a law was adopted, which stated the right of self-determination and demanded negotiations with the independence movements. These negotiations of the military lead firstly to cease-fires and subsequently to the recognition of independence in 1974 and 1975 respectively.

Still during the negotiations, in Mozambique white settlers revolted against the independence. Spinola himself opposed quick declarations of independence and therefore resigned in September 1974. This move only accelerated the process of decolonization. He tried to regain power in a putsch in March 1975 unsuccessfully. The following elections for a constitutional assembly brought a victory for the moderate forces in Portugal. They were challenged by attempts for putsches and revolutionary actions but were able to consolidate their newly won supremacy.

The Portuguese population did not realise the decolonization very much due to the chaotic situation in the mainland. After local elections, the respective colonies declared their independence. In Mozambique already in 1976, a civil war began. Also in Angola, a Portuguese High Commissioner should enable free elections, leading to a temporary government and independence. But already in 1975 also here a civil war broke out. The rivalling parties got supply by their international allies, making it one of the classic proxy wars during the Cold War period. In East Timor started a civil war too, in this case the country was soon occupied by Indonesia, an occupation that should last for 27 years.

[51] Gallagher (1983): 188.

[52] Ramos (2010): 715.

Macau stayed Portuguese until 1999 because the Chinese were not interested in losing an important point of exchange in terms of foreign currency and alike. In fact the Chinese had control over the small territory already since Chinese-staged trade-union demonstrations in the early 1960s showed the Portuguese authorities the necessity to coordinate their policies with the big neighbour.

Half a million Portuguese settlers fled to Portugal proper and therefore increased the population by 10% in 18 months. With them, many black Africans came to Europe Portugal, who were in possession of the Portuguese citizenship. Social chaos was one consequence and an unemployment rate of 40% within male inhabitants of Lisbon in the end of 1978. The integration of these people changed the social structure of the country lastingly since many of them were comparably well-educated young men. In April 1976, a new constitution was enacted and in March 1977, Lisbon sent a request for accession to the EEC. The uncertainty between African and European orientation found an end. The bigger part of Portugal's former colonies suffered decade-long civil wars. Their relationship with Portugal also for decades was difficult. One reason for this development also can be found in a certain imperial nostalgia of a part of the Portuguese population, which reiterates aspects of the ideology of Luso-Tropicalismo keeping alive the old image of a Portuguese exceptional position.

In conclusion one could state, that the regime was the standard-bearer of a Portuguese imperial standing and defender of its colonial empire. The approval to the concept of Portugal as an imperial nation by a large part of the opposition led to a stabilisation of the regime at the beginning of the war and several years after, since the regimes actions to maintain the colonies were out of question as a national goal except for the Communists. Therefore, the death of Salazar, a process of economic reorientation away from Africa towards Europe and a year-long process of erosion of power to finally end Portuguese sovereignty in Africa. Nevertheless, even after the collapse of the regime for some actors of the revolution the imperial claim was still alive. For the decisive factors within the Armed Forces, the chance to end the colonial war without a shameful defeat to distinguish themselves in the interior politics of the country was the reason to grant quick independence for the colonies, not moral considerations. Having said that, it is interesting and maybe even revealing, that the monument for the soldiers killed in action overseas bears only the names of the 9000 dead of European descent even though the colonial army sometimes consisted of 50% black Portuguese.

7 Concluding Thoughts

The Empire faced some severe setbacks already in times before. The loss of the major part of its Asian possessions centuries ago and the case of Brazil in 1822 meant the loss of the economically most important part of the Empire at the respective time. The Empire i.e. its centre moved from Asia to Brazil and the Atlantic and then to Africa. One can speculate whether this historic experience made the Portuguese believe, that even the biggest threat to

the colonies does not have to—or must not—lead to the outright end of Portugal as a nation with global influence, possessions and aspirations.

In Brazil, the new local elite played an important role in the movement for independence. The fact that the court fled from Napoleon for a few years and the elevation of Brazil to a kingdom accelerated the development of self-distinction.

In Africa in the twentieth century, local elites were scarce in terms of numbers and the bigger part of the settlers only came from Portugal during the war against the independence movements. There was not enough time to establish a sufficiently big society of settlers and locals who would create a common new self-esteem.

The question when it was clear for the actors that the Portuguese Empire would come to end is not easy to answer. Some circles even within the regime came to this conclusion probably already in the mid-1960s when the independence of a large number of similar regions was a few years old already and much mightier Imperial nations had to back down against the movements of independence. This becomes clear when the Portuguese Foreign ministry starts to think of how the movement away from the centre could be moderated at least to keep the territories as much as possible connected with the metropolitan centre. Others could not accept, that the century-long role of their country could come to an end in their life-span. Salazar's refusal to change anything in the countries doctrine in that respect is as remarkable as Caetano's refusal to even admit the existence of a real war being fought against colonial Portugal. Interestingly, the almost unopposed paradigm of Portugal as a colonial power was not mirrored by as many individual initiatives directed towards the colonies as one might expect. Economy and population soon looked more towards Europe than over the ocean in finding answers to daily problems of education and living standards.

A critical discussion of its own colonial history has not taken place sufficiently yet. This history still is often part of the commemorative culture in an uncritical manner. A good example is the fact, that Salazar was elected the greatest Portuguese of all time only in 2007[53] or a series of articles in a news-journal of some quality asking were the last Portuguese banners, which flew over the lost colonies are kept today.[54] The last Portuguese Empire was one without an Emperor. Salazar is as the coining figure presented himself always as a modest figure, nevertheless he had the last say on all and everything.

A phantom pain regarding lost greatness is still detectable in Portugal, something that some also say about Austria. Besides the high esteem in which Salazar still is held, the proudness of the past is always present, just use the Lisbon metro where many station celebrate it.

The Portuguese Empire was more or less the last to fall and at the same time, it was the oldest still existing in the twentieth century. The deep roots its existence took in Portuguese

[53] https://www.nzz.ch/das_gespenst_des_frueheren_diktators-1.594716.

[54] https://expresso.pt/sociedade/2015-06-27-Ultima-bandeira-portuguesa-de-Timor-esta-em-Jacarta#gs.tOmn580Fhttps://expresso.pt/dossies/diario/2015-06-19-No-rasto-das-ultimas-bandeiras-do-Imperio-1#gs.tKCnpMZj.

politics and self-perception throughout centuries enabled the country to withstand new global developments and military action to destroy it remarkably long.

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Das Ende des polnisch-litauischen Großreichs als Diskussionsfrage

Bogusław Dybaś

1 Einleitung

Der polnisch-litauische Staat, der schließlich 1569 als Ergebnis der in Lublin geschlossenen realen Union nach einer fast zwei Jahrhunderte währenden Personalunion zwischen Polen und Litauen seit dem Ende des 14. Jahrhunderts geschaffen wurde, überlebte weitere zwei Jahrhunderte. Es brach infolge der Aufteilung seines Territoriums zwischen den drei Nachbarmächten Russland, Preußen und Österreich in drei aufeinanderfolgenden Teilungen (1772, 1793, 1795) zusammen. Der Zusammenbruch des frühneuzeitlichen polnisch-litauischen Staates war ein äußerst wichtiges und vielfältiges Ereignis in der Geschichte Europas, vor allem aber wurde er zu einem der wichtigsten Ereignisse in der Geschichte Litauens und Polens.[1] Die folgenden Betrachtungen sind den verschiedenen Elementen der Entwicklung der Sichtweise auf diese Ereignisse in der polnischen Geschichtsschreibung und der nationalen Tradition gewidmet.

[1] Serejski 1970; Krzoska 2013.

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2 Die Dynamik der Entstehung, Entwicklung und des Niedergangs des polnisch-litauischen Reiches

Im 14. Jahrhundert spielten sowohl Polen als auch Litauen eine sehr wichtige Rolle im politischen Leben in Ostmitteleuropa. Polen konnte sich unter den letzten Herrschern der Piastendynastie nach der Epoche des Zerfalls in Teilherzogtümer wieder konsolidieren. Da es jedoch im Ringen mit Böhmen und dem Deutschen Orden nicht gelang, die früheren polnischen Gebiete wie Schlesien oder Pommerellen im Rahmen der neuen Monarchie wieder zu vereinen, wandte sich die polnische Expansion in südöstliche Richtung. In der Folge wurden die ruthenischen Gebiete mit Lemberg von König Kasimir dem Großen erworben. Unter diesem König wurde das Land modernisiert, es entwickelte sich wirtschaftlich und kulturell durchaus gut. Im Jahr 1364 wurde in Krakau die spätere und heutige Jagellonen-Universität gegründet.

Das Großfürstentum Litauen erwarb hingegen im 14. Jahrhundert unter den Fürsten Gediminas und Algirdas weitere ziemlich umfangreiche altrussische Gebiete und wurde zu einem der größten Reiche Europas sowie gleichzeitig zu einer wichtigen Konkurrenz für Moskau im Osten. Für das litauische Reich stellte die Integration der erworbenen riesigen ruthenischen, kulturell und konfessionell orthodoxen Gebiete in die gemeinsame Staatsorganisation mit Sicherheit eine große Herausforderung dar. In diesem Zusammenhang lautete die große Frage, ob sich Litauen orthodox bzw. römisch-katholisch christianisieren sollte. Ersteres hätte bedeutet, dass sich das gesamte Großfürstentum Litauen kulturell gewissermaßen unter dem Einfluss der eroberten ruthenischen Territorien befände. Die zweite Lösung konnte nur unter polnischer Vermittlung und in Zusammenarbeit mit Polen umgesetzt werden.

Obwohl es zu dieser Zeit Konfliktfelder zwischen Polen und Litauen gab, gab es auch gemeinsame Interessen. Ein gemeinsames Problem war zweifelsohne der Deutschordensstaat in Preußen, der sich teilweise in den von Polen erkämpften Gebieten (Pommerellen) entwickelte und in der Expansion gegen die heidnischen Litauer die Fortsetzung seiner Christianisierungsmission in dieser Region Europas sah.

Die Entscheidung fiel 1385, als der litauische Fürst Jagello die Herrscherin von Polen, Hedwig (Nachfolgerin von Ludwig dem Großen, König von Ungarn sowie von 1370 bis 1382 nach dem Tod Kasimirs des Großen auch König von Polen), ehelichte. Das war der erste Schritt im Bau der Union zwischen beiden Staaten, die zwar bald politische Ergebnisse brachte, als Polen und Litauen 1410 den Deutschen Orden in der Schlacht bei Grunwald (Tannenberg) besiegte, lange Zeit war sie jedoch eher von instabilem, personalen Charakter. Die reale Union war erst nach langem Prozess der Anpassung der verfassungsrechtlichen und sozialen Strukturen beider Länder möglich und wurde in der 1569 in Lublin geschlossenen Union umgesetzt. Infolge dieser Union entstand in Zentraleuropa ein neues Staatswesen, das zwar aus zwei Ländern bzw. Staaten („Republik beider Nationen“) bestand, die einige eigene Institutionen erhalten haben (wie zum Beispiel Heer, Steuerwesen u. a.). Es gab jedoch auch eine Reihe wichtiger gemeinsamer

Institutionen wie den Herrscher, den Reichstag und die Währung. Gemeinsam sollte auch die Außenpolitik sein.

Der Charakter und die Entwicklung der polnisch-litauischen Union nach 1569 werden auch heute noch, vor allem von polnischen und litauischen, teilweise auch von weißrussischen Historikern, diskutiert und sind immer wieder umstritten. Hingegen ist der Abschluss der realen Union in Lublin (1569) mit dem Ende der Dynastie der Jagellonen verbunden, sie starb im Jahr 1572 mit dem Tod von Sigismund August aus. Der Tod des letzten Jagellonen war Anlass und Möglichkeit, den verfassungsrechtlichen Charakter des gemeinsamen polnisch-litauischen Staates zu definieren. Mit den sog. Henricus-Artikeln (*artykuły henrykowskie* – vom Namen des in der ersten sog. freien Wahl gewählten Nachfolgers von Sigismund August, Henri de Valois) des Jahres 1573 erhielt der Staat eine ziemlich moderne und – wie man einräumen muss – demokratische Verfassung. Dieser Staat, nach der Lubliner Union als „Republik beider [politischer] Nationen", auf Polnisch als *Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów* bezeichnet, war verfassungsrechtlich *de facto* eine Adelsrepublik, in der die Dominanz des Adels eine Folge der langen Entwicklung im 16. Jahrhundert war. In dieser Zeit war es dem so genannten mittleren Adel gelungen, eine dem König und dem Hochadel (Magnaten bzw. Senatoren – vom Sitz im königlichen Rat, dem Senat) gleichgestellte Position zu erlangen.

Neben den Henricus-Artikeln war auch die sogenannte „Warschauer Konföderation" eine der Grundsteine der Verfassungsregelungen im Jahr 1573. Als „Warschauer Konföderation" (Warschauer Religionsfriede, pax dissidentium) wird der Beschluss des Konvokationsreichstages vom 28. Januar 1573 bezeichnet, der den Adeligen aller Bekenntnisse (mit Ausnahme der Antitrinitarier) dieselben politischen Rechte garantierte und die religiöse Toleranz in Polen-Litauen begründete.

Diese verfassungsrechtliche Form der polnisch-litauischen Republik als einer Adelsrepublik mit garantierten Rechten für die verschiedenen Konfessionen darf man einerseits als die Krönung einer gelungenen Verbindung zweier Staatsgefüge, andererseits als ziemlich interessante Alternative zur Entwicklung des frühneuzeitlichen Staatwesens in Richtung Absolutismus und Konfessionalisierung bezeichnen.

Das Problem lag darin, dass das verfassungsrechtliche System der Adelsrepublik, das zumindest für den Adel demokratisch und ziemlich modern war, nach frühneuzeitlichen Kriterien politisch jedoch nicht besonders effizient war. Trotz der Gestaltung der Adelsrepublik muss man feststellen, dass der Sieg des mittleren Adels im 16. Jahrhundert in seiner Rivalität mit dem König als auch mit den Hochadeligen (Magnaten) nicht konsolidiert wurde. Sowohl der König als auch die Magnaten verzichteten nicht auf die Stärkung ihrer Position im Staatssystem. Die Herrscher (obwohl sie Wahlkönige waren) strebten in den nächsten Jahrzehnten und Jahrhunderten immer danach, die königliche Macht zu stärken, sogar den Absolutismus einzuführen und eine Erbmonarchie zu etablieren. Die ständige Rivalität zwischen dem König und dem Adel wurde in Polen-Litauen als Konflikt *inter maiestatem ac libertatem* bezeichnet. Die Magnaten, dank ihres wirtschaftlichen Potentials und der Tatsache, dass sie zumeist die Hauptwürdenträger im Staat waren, spielten selbstverständlich eine sehr bedeutende politische Rolle.

In der politischen Realität führte dies in Polen-Litauen zu einer Art von Blockade. Alle Teilnehmer des politischen Lebens konnten die gegen die jeweils andere Seite gerichteten Aktivitäten des jeweils anderen Partners lediglich bekämpfen. Der Adel konnte gegen den König, manchmal auch gegen die Magnaten, in einem Rokosch (einer bewaffneten Rebellion) oder in einer Konföderation revoltieren. Der König, der die Vergabe der Würden sowie auch der Güter der königlichen Domäne für sich behalten hatte, konnte die Karrieren der Adeligen bzw. Hochadeligen mitunter erfolgreich behindern oder sogar vereiteln. Die Magnaten konnten durch den von ihnen abhängigen niederen Adel und dank des unklaren Entscheidungssystems im Reichstag (Sejm) – dem berühmten „liberum veto" und dem Prinzip der Einstimmigkeit – alle für sie ungünstigen Beschlusse torpedieren. Dies führte oft, besonders seit der Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts, zum Zerbrechen der Reichstage und de facto zur Lähmung der Legislative und des zentralen politischen Systems. Über wichtige Probleme mussten in dieser Situation die lokalen Landtage entscheiden. Dies war einer der Gründe der Dezentralisierung des staatlichen Systems. In der politischen Praxis war die Effizienz des Systems von der Bereitschaft der Partner, Kompromisse zu schließen, abhängig. Dies diente jedoch nicht der potenziellen Expansion des Reiches nach außen, auch deswegen, weil eventuelle territoriale Erwerbungen vom Adel als gefährlich wahrgenommen wurden. Jeder militärische Erfolg hätte – nach Ansicht des Adels und der Magnaten – vom König zur Stärkung seiner Position ausgenutzt werden können.

Angesichts dieser innerstaatlichen Situation war Polen-Litauen im ausgehenden 16., 17. und 18. Jahrhundert gleichzeitig mit den immer stärkeren militärischen und autoritären bzw. absolutistischen Mächten wie zum Beispiel Schweden, dem Osmanischen Reich und später Russland, weiters mit Preußen und der Habsburgermonarchie, konfrontiert und konnte den Herausforderungen dieser Konfrontation nicht gerecht werden. In diesem Zusammenhang sollten wir die Dynamik der außenpolitischen Position des polnisch-litauischen Reiches in unser Blickfeld nehmen. War die Republik noch Ende des 16. sowie in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhundert die Hauptmacht in dieser Region Europas und sogar in der Lage, neue Gebiete zu erobern sowie sich aktiv in die russische Krise (Smuta) zu Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts einzumischen, wurde diese Position infolge der Kriege gegen Schweden allmählich geschwächt. Die Krise begann Mitte dieses Jahrhunderts, als Polen-Litauen zunächst mit dem großen Kosakenaufstand von Bohdan Chmielnicki 1648, später mit Konflikten mit Russland (1654–1667) und Schweden (in der Zeit von 1655 bis 1660), konfrontiert war. Eine Folge dieser Kriege waren bedeutende territoriale Verluste, vor allem zugunsten Russlands. Trotz der entscheidenden Teilnahme beim Entsatz von Wien im Jahr 1683 unter König Jan III. Sobieski war Polen-Litauen bereits keine so bedeutende Macht mehr wie früher. Für den Zusammenbruch der außenpolitischen Position des Reiches war der große Nordische Krieg zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts entscheidend. Nach dem Tod Sobieskis zum polnischen König gewählt, war August II. der Starke einer der Initiatoren des Krieges mit Schweden im Jahr 1700. Nach seiner Niederlage im Zusammenstoß mit Karl XII. verlor er jedoch den polnischen Thron und konnte erst nach dem Sieg von Zar Peter I. bei Poltawa (1709) auf den polnischen Thron zurückkehren. Die russische Unterstützung war auch ausschlaggebend dafür, dass

sein Sohn August III. (1733–1763) den polnischen Thron erobern konnte. In den nächsten Jahrzehnten dieses Jahrhunderts war Polen-Litauen kein Akteur der großen Politik mehr, sondern eher ein Gegenstand dieser großen Politik. Man kann sagen, dass Polen Mitte des Jahrhunderts eine Art Protektorat von Russland wurde. Trotz der Reformversuche in den 1760er und an der Wende der 1780er- und 1790er-Jahre kam es zu den drei Teilungen Polens (1772, 1793 und 1795), bei denen Russland gemeinsam mit Preußen und Österreich die Territorien von Polen-Litauen geteilt hat.

3 Die Geschichte des Doppelreiches als der Weg zum Niedergang – historiographischer Streit

Die oben skizzierte Geschichte von Polen-Litauen seit der endgültigen Gestaltung der Realunion (1569), der Adelsrepublik und der Wahlmonarchie (1573) bis zu den Teilungen 200 Jahre später kann selbstverständlich Anlass zur Feststellung geben, dass die Geschichte dieses Reiches eigentlich eine Geschichte seines Niedergangs war. Die polnische historiografische Diskussion, aber auch der allgemeinere polnische Diskurs nach den Teilungen kreiste im 19. sowie auch im 20. Jahrhundert zum einen um die Frage, zu welchem Zeitpunkt die ersten Symptome der Krise zu bemerken waren und ab wann über den Beginn der eigentlichen Krise gesprochen werden kann. Zum anderen gilt sie der Frage nach der eigentlichen Ursache der Teilungen und des endgültigen Niedergangs. In der Folge wurde die Erzählung über die Geschichte der polnisch-litauischen Republik vom Niedergang und von den Teilungen dominiert.

Die drei Teilungen von Polen-Litauen in den Jahren 1772, 1793 und 1795 und in diesem Kontext die Beurteilung des polnisch-litauischen Doppelreiches kennzeichneten und prägten gewissermaßen den polnischen nationalen Diskurs im 19., 20., aber auch im 21. Jahrhundert. In der Historiografie selbst entwickelten sich in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts zwei Hauptrichtungen: die pessimistische, die sog. „Krakauer Historische Schule“, die die Hauptursachen des Niedergangs der Republik in der inneren Krise sowie in Anarchie und Insuffizienz des politischen und verfassungsrechtlichen Systems sah, und die optimistische, die sog. „Warschauer Historische Schule“, die viele positive Elemente in der inneren Entwicklung von Polen-Litauen, besonders in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts, erkannte und als Ursache des Niedergangs eher die Politik der Teilungsmächte betrachtete.

Die Entwicklung dieser beiden Richtungen muss im Zusammenhang mit der damaligen politischen Situation gesehen werden. Dieser Kontext der Entwicklung der polnischen Geschichtsschreibung ist die Tatsache, dass sie sich unter den Bedingungen der Nichtexistenz des polnischen Staates entwickelt hat, was sicherlich das Fehlen eines Bezugspunktes in Form des nationalen Staates bedeutete. Dies könnte einerseits eine gewisse intellektuelle Freiheit, andererseits aber einige äußere Einschränkungen bedeuten. Sie hing von der Situation eines gegebenen Teilungsgebiets und den dortigen Bedingungen der nationalen Lebensentwicklung ab. Während die Bedingungen in Galizien, das

Autonomie genoss, praktisch unbegrenzt waren, gab es in den preußischen und russischen Teilungsgebieten ernsthafte Einschränkungen. Die Kristallisation dieser Richtungen in der Geschichtsschreibung fand in der Zeit nach der Niederlage des Januaraufstandes 1863/1864 statt, die für lange Zeit den Verlust der Hoffnung auf Unabhängigkeit bedeutete.

Der geistige Vater der „Krakauer Historischen Schule" war Pater Walerian Kalinka (1826–1886), und die prominentesten Vertreter waren Józef Szujski (1835–1883) und Michał Bobrzyński (1849–1935). Im Allgemeinen wurden die Gründe für den Zusammenbruch des polnischen Staates in den Unvollkommenheiten der Staats- und Verfassungsinstitutionen gesehen, deren Form ein innerpolnisches Problem war. Das bedeutete, dass die Schuld für den Zusammenbruch des Staates und der Teilungen nicht bei der Außenwelt lag, sondern bei den Polen, die nicht in der Lage waren, ihrem Staat eine angemessene und effektive Form zu geben.[2] Die populärste Darstellung der Position der „Krakauer Schule" war das Buch „Dzieje Polski w zarysie" („Geschichte Polens im Abriss") von Bobrzyński, das 1879 zum ersten Mal veröffentlicht wurde.[3] Bobrzyński war nicht nur Historiker, sondern auch ein aktiver Politiker; 1908 wurde er Statthalter von Galizien.[4]

Die „Historische Warschauer Schule" hat sich seit der Wende der 1870er- und 1880er-Jahre als Reaktion auf die „Krakauer Schule" entwickelt, angeblich auch, weil deren Ansichten von der russischen Propaganda politisch instrumentalisiert wurden. Ihre wichtigsten Vertreter, die der „Krakauer Schule" kritisch gegenüberstanden, waren Aleksander Rembowski (1847–1906), Tadeusz Korzon (1839–1918) und Władysław Smoleński (1851–1926). Sie stellten sich gegen die Krakauer These über den selbstverschuldeten Niedergang Polens und betonten den Strom der Wiederbelebung in verschiedenen Bereichen des wirtschaftlichen, sozialen und kulturellen Lebens in der letzten Phase der Existenz des polnisch-litauischen Staates. Im Gegensatz zu den Krakauer Historikern waren sie der Meinung, dass nicht nur der Staat, sondern auch oder vor allem die Gesellschaft Gegenstand der Forschung sein sollte.[5]

Der Konflikt zwischen den beiden Schulen wurde in gewisser Weise in einem Buch von Władysław Smoleński artikuliert, das 1898 veröffentlicht wurde.[6] Er spielte sich nicht nur im Diskurs der Gelehrten ab, sondern wurde zu einer Tatsache, die in weiten gesellschaftlichen Kreisen präsent war und wahrgenommen wurde, wie das Gedicht des

[2] Grabski 2000: 126–134.

[3] Bobrzyński 1974: Die erste Ausgabe des Buches erschien 1879, die zweite, leicht modifiziert, in den Jahren 1880–1881. In der zitierten Ausgabe von 1974 haben die Herausgeber Marian Henryk Serejski und Andrzej Feliks Grabski die Unterschiede zwischen der ersten und der zweiten Ausgabe zusammengestellt.

[4] Łazuga 1982.

[5] Grabski 2000: 136–140.

[6] Smoleński 1898.

bedeutenden polnischen Dichters Adam Asnyk (1838–1897) belegt, das ironisch auf die Krakauer These verweist.[7]

Diese geteilten Meinungen sind im polnischen wissenschaftlichen Diskurs nach wie vor deutlich sichtbar. Man muss jedoch zugeben, dass die Rivalität zwischen den „pessimistischen" Krakauer und den „optimistischen" Warschauer historischen Schulen der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts eher für die letzte erfolgreich war. Die These von der ausschließlichen innerpolnischen Schuld an den Trennwänden hielt nicht stand, und im 20. Jahrhundert neigte die polnische Geschichtsschreibung eher zu der These, dass die Teilungen den Prozess der Wiedergeburt des polnischen Staates und der polnischen Gesellschaft, auch auf der Ebene der staatlichen Institutionen, unterbrachen. Symbolisch wird dies am besten durch den Untertitel des 1996 in englischer Sprache erschienenen Buches von Józef Andrzej Gierowski, veranschaulicht, das vom Doyen der polnischen frühneuzeitlichen Geschichtsschreibung in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts verfasst wurde: "The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the XVIIIth Century. From Anarchy to Well-organised State".[8]

4 Geschichte und Vorgeschichte des Untergangs

Der Zusammenbruch des polnisch-litauischen Commonwealth hängt in erster Linie mit den Ereignissen des 18. Jahrhunderts zusammen und wird aus dieser Perspektive analysiert. Die ersten Symptome des Niedergangs sieht man in der Historiographie manchmal sehr früh, schon an der Wende vom 16. zum 17. Jahrhundert, als es während der Regierungszeit des zweiten polnischen Wahlkönigs, Sigismund III. Wasa, der nach der Stärkung der königlichen Macht und der Konfessionalisierung im römisch-katholischen Sinne strebte, zu einem scharfen inneren Konflikt und sogar zu einem Bürgerkrieg (infolge der adeligen Revolte – Rokosch) in den Jahren 1606–1609 kam.[9] In dieser Epoche, bereits im Jahr 1597, erschienen die vom königlichen Prediger, dem Jesuiten Piotr Skarga verfassten sog. „Sejm-Predigten", die im Kontext des aktuellen politischen Kampfes, vor allem zwischen dem jungen König und der adeligen Opposition unter der Führung von Kronkanzler Jan Zamoyski, die Lage des Landes, die schlechte Verfassung des Reiches und die schlechten Sitten und Gewohnheiten des Adels kritisierten. Die Predigten (es gibt insgesamt acht davon) sind im Geiste der Gegenreformation und in dem Wunsch gehalten, die Macht des Königs zu stärken. In den folgenden Predigten werden die „Krankheiten der Republik"

[7] Serejski 1972: 37–38.

[8] Gierowski 1996.

[9] Damit befasst sich die frisch erschienene gründliche Monografie: Pawłowska-Kubik 2019; Eine andere Perspektive auf die Geschichte des Rokosch bietet Kolja Lichy (2021), der seine Dissertation zum Thema: „Stand und Aufstand. Adel und polnisch-litauisches Gemeinwesen im Rokosz von 1606–1609" 2015 an der Universität Gießen verteidigt hat. Die Arbeit ist noch nicht veröffentlicht worden.

aufgezählt, wie „häusliche Zwietracht“, die abnehmende Bedeutung des katholischen Glaubens, die Schwächung der königlichen Macht und die ungerechten Gesetze.[10] Im 19. Jahrhundert wurden die Predigten von Skarga als Ankündigung des Niederganges der Republik wahrgenommen und interpretiert, was das Gemälde des bekanntesten polnischen Historienmaler Jan Matejko ganz deutlich widerspiegelt.[11]

Noch mehr Symptome des sich ankündigenden Niedergangs wurden natürlich Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts erkannt, als Polen-Litauen infolge der Kriege gegen die Kosaken (1648–1658), Russland (1654–1667) und Schweden (1655–1660) tatsächlich in eine sehr tiefe Krise geriet.[12] Die Initialen des damals regierenden Königs, Johann Kasimir Wasa, ICR (Ioannes Casimirus Rex), wurden als „Initium Calamitatis Regni“ gelesen und interpretiert. Dieser, aus der gegen den König gerichteten Propaganda stammende Einfall wurde im polnischen kollektiven Gedächtnis in der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts vom Journalisten, Essayisten und Historienschriftsteller Paweł Jasienica (Leon Lech Beynar, 1909–1970) gewissermaßen verewigt. Jasienica war Autor der Reihe der Bücher über die Geschichte Polens – „Das Polen der Piasten“, „Das Polen der Jagellonen“ und „Republik beider Nationen“, die in den Jahren 1960–1972 publiziert wurden. Das letzte dieser Bücher war in den Jahren 1569/1572–1795 dem polnisch-litauischen Commonwealth gewidmet und erschien in den Jahren 1967–1972. Der zweite Teil des Buches, der mit dem Ausbruch des Kosakenaufstandes von 1648 und dem Beginn der Herrschaft von König Johann Kasimir beginnt, wurde gerade mit dem Untertitel „Calamitatis Regni“ versehen.[13]

Wenn die Teilungen des polnisch-litauischen Doppelreiches in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts den endgültigen Niedergang der polnisch-litauischen Republik bedeuteten, war gerade die Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts, die Regierungszeit von Jan Kasimir Wasa, jener Moment, der als der Beginn der „Idee der Teilungen“ in der polnischen Geschichte wahrgenommen wurde und wird. Als Polen-Litauen während des Nordischen Krieges gegen eine Koalition der Gegner kämpfte, wurde im Dezember 1656 der Vertrag von Radnot geschlossen, der die Teilung der Republik unter Siebenbürgen, Schweden, Brandenburg-Preußen, Kosaken und dem litauischen Magnaten Bogusław Radziwiłł vorsah. Initiator dieses Abkommens war der schwedische König Karl Gustav, aber die Idee einer Teilung erwies sich zu diesem Zeitpunkt als unrealistisch, da die polnisch-litauische Republik vom Kaiser unterstützt wurde, Dänemark gegen Schweden vorging und das Heer des siebenbürgischen Fürsten Georg II. Rákóczi 1657 von der polnischen Armee vollständig zerschlagen wurde.[14] Der Vertrag von Radnot wurde nicht umgesetzt,

[10] Unter den zahlreichen Editionen der „Sejm-Predigten“ die letzte wissenschaftliche Edition: Skarga 2008.

[11] Das Gemälde ist u. a. auf folgender Seite zu sehen: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazanie_Skargi#/media/Plik:Kazanie_Skargi.jpg (Zugriff 27.06.2020).

[12] Die letzte Darstellung der Krise bei: Opaliński 2018.

[13] Jasienica 1982.

[14] Opaliński 2018: 337–338, 354–361; Stangreciuk 2007.

zu diesem Zeitpunkt erwies sich die Republik politisch und militärisch als zu stark, um geteilt zu werden, die Erinnerung an dieses Ereignis blieb jedoch aufrecht, zumal König Jan Kasimir während der Sejmsitzung im Jahr 1661 die Gefahr, dass Polen-Litauen unter Russland (Ostgebiete, wo die Orthodoxie dominierte), Brandenburg-Preußen und Habsburgermonarchie geteilt würde, voraussah.[15] Da diese Prophezeiung mit dem tatsächlichen Verlauf der Teilungen mehr als hundert Jahre später in großen Zügen übereinstimmte und der König sie bei seiner Abdankung 1668 (als einziger polnischer König) wiederholte, wurde das Fatum der Teilungen ein stets präsentes Element der historischen Analysen der späteren Jahrzehnte. Besonders „beliebt" waren in diesem Zusammenhang verschiedene, nicht immer glückliche politische Initiativen und Konzeptionen von König August dem Starken zu Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts. Sein angeblich konstantes Streben nach der Formulierung der Konzepte der Teilung der polnisch-litauischen Republik für Verwirklichung seiner eigenen politischen Pläne, das von der früheren polnischen Geschichtsschreibung nach Johann Gustav Bernhard Droysen übernommen wurde, ist jedoch in den letzten Jahren in Frage gestellt worden.[16]

Die Kriege in der Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts brachten sicherlich nicht den endgültigen Zusammenbruch der polnisch-litauischen Republik, und die Krise wurde trotz enormer demographischer Verluste, der Zerstörung des Landes durch Kriege und dem Verlust eines Teils des Territoriums überwunden. Die zweite Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts, nach der Abdankung von König Johann Kasimir 1668, wird als die Zeit der „Könige-Landsleute" bezeichnet und mit der Herrschaft der Könige aus der Wasa-Dynastie in eine Epoche kombiniert.[17] Der Name rührt daher, dass damals zwei aus dem einheimischen Hochadel stammenden Könige, Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki (1669–1673) und Jan III. Sobieski (1674–1696), regierten. Die Regierungszeit Sobieskis wird oft als die letzte Periode der Herrlichkeit der „alten Republik" bezeichnet und als solche mit der späteren Herrschaft der Könige aus der sächsischen Wettiner-Dynastie, August II. der Starke und August III. (1697–1763), kontrastiert. Eine solche Einschätzung von Sobieskis Regierungszeit wurde vor allem durch seinen großen politischen und militärischen Erfolg beeinflusst, nämlich seine Teilnahme am Entsatz von Wien 1683. Dieser Erfolg wurde jedoch schnell durch den Mangel an weiteren Erfolgen im Krieg mit dem Osmanischen Reich und vor allem durch die akute innere Krise der 1680er- und 1690er-Jahre überschattet.

Die Herrschaft der Wettiner hingegen wird in der Nationalmythologie und oft auch in der Geschichtsschreibung als die „schwarze Epoche" des Staatszerfalls angesehen. Sie wird auch oft mit der Regierungszeit des letzten Königs Stanisław August Poniatowski (1764–1795) kontrastiert, weil es damals Versuche gab, Staat und Gesellschaft im Geiste der Aufklärung zu reformieren und wiederzubeleben. Die dramatischen Ereignisse des Großen Nordischen Krieges (1700–1721) hatten einen besonderen Einfluss auf die

[15] Ochmann 1977; 90–91.

[16] Staszewski 1997; Kosińska 2009.

[17] Konopczyński 1936; Augustyniak 1999.

Bewertung der „sächsischen Zeit“. Da es dem zunächst in diesem Krieg siegreichen König Karl XII. von Schweden gelang, August II. den Starken zur Abdankung zu zwingen (1706) und ihm gehorsamen den nächsten „König – Landsmann“ Stanisław Leszczyński auf den polnischen Thron zu setzen, und Augusts Rückkehr auf den Thron erst nach dem Sieg von Zar Peter I. über Karl XII. in der Schlacht von Poltawa (1709) möglich war, erweckte es den Eindruck, als stünde die Republik unter der vollständigen Kontrolle fremder Mächte, letztlich Russlands. Dieser Eindruck wurde durch die angebliche russische Vermittlung in einer innenpolitischen Auseinandersetzung während des sogenannten „Stummen Sejms“ 1717 noch vertieft. Eine solche Einschätzung dieses Ereignisses – als Beweis für den überwältigenden Einfluss Russlands auf die politische Situation der polnisch-litauischen Republik – wurde jedoch in Frage gestellt, und die Zäsur von 1717 wird heute eher als die erste erfolgreiche Reform des polnisch-litauischen Staates angesehen.[18]

Dennoch lässt sich schwerlich in Frage stellen, dass der Große Nordische Krieg ein wichtiger Durchbruch für die internationale Stellung des polnisch-litauischen Reiches als unabhängige Kraft war. Sie wurde zweifellos in überwältigender Weise von der russischen Politik beeinflusst. Die Frage, wie es zu diesem Prozess kam, zu welchem Zeitpunkt man sagen kann, dass die polnisch-litauische Republik zu einem russischen Protektorat wurde, aber auch – wie es zu Versuchen des inneren Wiederaufbaus und der Stärkung der internationalen Position des Staates kam – ist Gegenstand intensiver Diskussionen unter polnischen (aber nicht nur polnischen) Historikern, insbesondere in den letzten Jahrzehnten.[19]

5 Die Frage des Untergangs der polnisch-litauischen Republik in den Synthesen der polnischen Geschichte

Diese Diskussionen spiegeln zweifellos die Synthesen der Geschichte Polens bzw. des polnisch-litauischen Commonwealth wider, die seit dem 19. Jahrhundert in Polen in großer Zahl entstanden. Ihr Charakter wird weitgehend von der gegenwärtigen Situation des Staates und der Nation bestimmt. Wenn wir über die Rivalität zwischen den Krakauer und Warschauer historischen Schulen gesprochen haben, haben wir festgestellt, dass sie in der Zeit der Nichtexistenz des polnischen Staates stattfand. Die in der Zwischenkriegszeit, als Polen 1918 seine Unabhängigkeit erlangte, entstandenen Werke können eine andere Sichtweise präsentieren. Die Perspektive der Betrachtung der Geschichte des Landes und der Nation wurde natürlich durch die politische Situation nach 1945 verändert, als Polen sich im Kreis des Einflusses der Sowjetunion befand, aber diese Zeit war durch

[18] Die Entwicklung der „schwarzen Legende“ des Stummen Sejms in den Synthesen der Geschichte Polens und ihre Konfrontation mit den Erkenntnissen der Geschichtsschreibung in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts gibt: Glabisz 2019.

[19] Eine detaillierte Darstellung des Problems bei Michael G. Müller: Müller 1984: 20–24.

verschiedene historische Etappen und auch verschiedene Möglichkeiten der historischen Forschung und ihrer Darstellung in Publikationen gekennzeichnet. Die 1970er-Jahre waren hier besonders wichtig, als mehrere wichtige Gesamtdarstellungen der polnischen Geschichte vorbereitet und veröffentlicht wurden. Es ist eine Binsenweisheit zu sagen, dass die Wende von 1989 in dieser Hinsicht ganz neue Möglichkeiten und neue Perspektiven eröffnet hat.

Ich kann hier nicht alle synthetischen Werke im Überfluss präsentieren, weil es zu viel Material gibt. Die inhaltliche Struktur und Gliederung des Materials sowie die angenommene Periodisierung sind jedoch oft ein guter Test dafür, wie sich der Prozess der Krise oder des Zusammenbruchs des Staates darstellt. Wie anschaulich und eindeutig die Titel der Kapitel sein können, zeigt die bereits zitierte Synthese von Bobrzyński und die einzelnen Kapiteltitel in diesem Buch: „Eine Rückkehr zum Katholizismus. Zygmunt III. vergeudet die Früchte des großen Werkes von Stefan Bathory (1574–1606)"; „Falsche Außenpolitik führt dazu, dass Polen an politischer Bedeutung in Europa verliert (1608–1655)"; „Falsche Außenpolitik vereitelt Versuche, sich vom Sturz zu erholen (1655–1717)"; „Das Übergewicht Russlands. Eine vollständige Anarchie endet mit der ersten Teilung des Landes (1717–1773)".[20] Die Erzähllinie von Bobrzyński ist klar: Seit dem Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts ist die polnische Geschichte eine Kette von Misserfolgen, die direkt zum Sturz führte (Bobrzyński endet seine Geschichte an der ersten Teilung).

In späteren Synthesen kann man oft ein Streben nach einer gewissen Neutralität erkennen, wenn man in der Erzählung die Chronologie der Herrschaft einzelner Herrscher nimmt. Dies ist der Fall bei der in der Zwischenkriegszeit erschienen Synthese von Władysław Konopczyński.[21] Konopczyński (1880–1952) war sicherlich einer der besten Kenner der Frühen Neuzeit in der polnischen Geschichte und sicherlich ein hervorragender Kenner des 18. Jahrhunderts. Gleichzeitig war er ein Forscher mit klaren Ansichten und einem großen Einfluss auf spätere Generationen von Historikern. Die Aufteilung des Buches in zwei Bände mit einer Zäsur im Jahr 1648 ist eher eine mechanische Aufteilung des Materials, die mit dem Beginn der neuen Herrschaft (Johann Kasimir) übereinstimmt, als eine Erklärung der wesentlichen Bedeutung dieser Zäsur. Er widmet dem siebzehnten Jahrhundert eine separate Zusammenfassung („Ergebnisse des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts"). In der letzten Regierungszeit dieses Jahrhunderts (Jan Sobieski, 1674–1696) sieht er jedoch eine deutliche Zäsur im Entsatz von Wien 1683 und verwendet für die spätere Zeit (nach 1683) den in der polnischen Tradition und Geschichtsschreibung sehr populären Begriff „Im Joch der Heiligen Liga". Das 18. Jahrhundert analysiert Konopczyński hauptsächlich aus einer internen Perspektive. Die Titel der beiden Unterkapitel des Kapitels über die Regierungszeit von August II. Starken sind hier von Bedeutung: „Eine Nation in einem Zwiespalt" und „Zwischen Majestät und Freiheit". Auch in dem Kapitel, das der Regierungszeit Augusts III. (1733–1763) gewidmet ist, in dessen Thronbesetzung die

[20] Bobrzyński 1974: 494–495.

[21] Konopczyński 1936.

Einmischung Russlands die entscheidende Bedeutung hatte, was eine weitreichende Abhängigkeit des polnisch-litauischen Commonwealth von dieser Macht mit sich brachte, finden wir einen Unterabschnitt mit dem Titel „Versuche zur Rettung des Republik (1736–1748)“ und Symptome der bevorstehenden Wiedergeburt. In diesem Sinne steht Konopczyński den Historikern der „Warschauer Schule“ nahe und stellt sowohl die Wiederbelebung von Nation und Staat in den letzten Jahrzehnten des 18. Jahrhunderts fest als auch und vor allem sieht die Ursachen der Teilungen an der Seite der aggressiven Nachbarmächte.

Nach 1945 gab es neben der umfangreichen Synthese der polnischen Geschichte, die in den 1950er- und 1960er-Jahren am Institut für Geschichte der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften erstellt wurde, vor allem in der zweiten Hälfte der 1970er-Jahre eine Reihe neuer synthetischen Studien. 1975 erschien die von den Historikern an der Universität Posen vorbereitete einbändige Synthese „Dzieje Polski“ („Geschichte Polens“), herausgegeben von Jerzy Topolski, der darin auch den frühneuzeitlichen Teil verfasste.[22] 1978 erschienen die sogenannten „Krakauer Vierer“ (weil von den Historikern der Jagiellonen-Universität in Krakau, Jerzy Wyrozumski, Józef Andrzej Gierowski und Józef Buszko, vorbereitet), eine vierbändige „Historia Polski“ („Geschichte Polens“), in der zwei mittleren, neuzeitlichen Bände von Józef Andrzej Gierowski geschrieben wurden.[23] Schließlich erschien 1979 in Warschau das von Janusz Tazbir herausgegebene Buch „Zarys historii Polski“ („Ein Überblick über die polnische Geschichte“), in dem Teile zur frühneuzeitlichen Geschichte von Andrzej Wyczański, Janusz Tazbir und Emanuel Rostworowski vorbereitet wurden.[24]

In all diesen Synthesen gibt es eine klare, genetisch von der „Warschauer Schule“ abgeleitete These, dass in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts die Prozesse der nationalen, wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Wiederbelebung sichtbar sind, auch wenn die Chronologie dieser Prozesse unterschiedlich formuliert ist. Zugleich wird in keinem dieser Werke bestritten, dass die Position der polnisch-litauischen Republik in der internationalen Politik im 18. Jahrhundert schwach und allenfalls zweitrangig war. In dieser Situation muss die aggressive Politik der Nachbarmächte eine ernsthafte Bedrohung für Polen und Litauen dargestellt haben. Auch hier sind aber einige Details strittig.

Jerzy Topolski gliederte die frühneuzeitliche Geschichte Polens in drei Zeitabschnitten, hauptsächlich nach dem Kriterium der Kulturgeschichte, teilweise nach der Sozial- und politischen Geschichte: 1) Polen während der Renaissance und der Vorherrschaft des Adels (1501–1618), 2) Polen während der Barockzeit und der sich entwickelnden Magnatenoligarchie (1618–1733), 3) Polen während der Aufklärung (1733–1795).[25] Zwei Zäsuren sind bei dieser Periodisierung symptomatisch. Das Jahr 1618 symbolisiert

[22] Topolski 1975.

[23] Gierowski 1978.

[24] Wyczański 1979; Tazbir 1979; Rostworowski 1979.

[25] Topolski 1975.

zum einen das Ende der äußeren Expansion des polnisch-litauischen Staates – in diesem Jahr wurde nach dem Krieg während der „Großen Smuta“ ein Waffenstillstand mit Russland geschlossen, infolgedessen die polnisch-litauische Republik ihre letzten territorialen Erwerbe (u. a. die Rückeroberung der strategisch wichtigen Festung Smolensk) erreichte. In diesem Jahr, dem Jahr des Ausbruchs des Dreißigjährigen Krieges, kam es aber auch zu einer Verbindung der Herrschaft über Brandenburg und das Herzogtum Preußen (später Ostpreußen) in einer Hand – dem Kurfürsten von Brandenburg aus der Hohenzollern-Dynastie. Diese Tatsache gehört zu den wichtigen in der Vorgeschichte des späteren Königreichs Preußen, einer der Mächte, die an der Teilung des polnisch-litauischen Commonwealth beteiligt waren. Die zweite symptomatische Zäsur ist das Jahr 1733, der Beginn der Herrschaft von König August III. Wettin als Beginn der Aufklärung und damit auch der Beginn der Erneuerungs- und Wiedergeburtsprozesse des Staates und der Gesellschaft.

Die Synthese von Józef Andrzej Gierowski basiert auf der Periodisierung, die noch in der großen Synthese der polnischen Geschichte von den 1950er- und 1960er-Jahren angenommen wurde. Beide Teile der Synthese von Gierowski werden nämlich durch das Jahr 1764 geteilt, das der Beginn der Bildung der „modernen polnischen Nation“ sein sollte.[26] Die herkömmlich festgelegte letzte Zäsur dieses Prozesses ist die Niederlage des Januaraufstandes in den Jahren 1863–1864. 1764 teilt Gierowskis Lehrbuch also in zwei Teile, aber die Periodisierung der Frühen Neuzeit umfasst wiederum (wie bei Topolski) drei Epochen: „Die Republik des Adels [1505–1648]“, „Die Republik der Magnaten [1648–1764]“ und „Die Aufgeklärte Republik [1764–1795]“. Gierowskis Synthese spiegelt eine in der polnischen Geschichtsschreibung nach 1945 sehr populäre These wider, dass der Grund für den Zusammenbruch der polnisch-litauischen Republik in der Herrschaft der Magnaten, der so genannten „Magnatenoligarchie“, lag, die sich von der früheren, eher positiv bewerteten „Adelsdemokratie“ abhob. Dies zeigt sich ganz deutlich in der Struktur dieses Teils von Gierowskis Arbeit, die sowohl den wirtschaftlichen Zusammenbruch und die Prozesse der sozialen Desintegration als auch den Kampf um die territoriale Integrität des Staates berücksichtigt. Trotz des Krisenbewusstseins unter den Eliten und der Reformbemühungen ist das das Funktionieren des politischen Systems lähmende „liberum veto“ das Symbol der Innenpolitik geworden. Das unbestreitbare Verdienst von Józef Andrzej Gierowski, nicht nur in diesem Buch, ist die ausgewogene Darstellung der so genannten „sächsischen Zeit“, die für Gierowski schon nicht mehr das Stigma eines eindeutigen Sturzes trägt.

Die Periodisierung der von Janusz Tazbir herausgegebenen Synthese mit Texten – im frühneuzeitlichen Teil – von Tazbir selbst, Andrzej Wyczański und Emanuel Rostworowski basiert (wie im Fall von Jerzy Topolskis Posener Synthese) in erster Linie auf kulturellen und teilweise dynastischen Kriterien. Der von Andrzej Wyczański

[26] Gierowski 1978.

geschriebene Teil ist betitelt: „Das Zeitalter der Renaissance [1501/1506 – 1586].[27] Der von Janusz Tazbir geschriebene Teil trägt den Titel: „Die Herrschaft der Wasa-Könige und das Barockzeitalter [1587–1696]", während der letzte – von Emanuel Rostworowski – „Die Sächsische Zeit und die Aufklärung [1697–1795]“ lautet.[28] In seinem Kapitel analysiert Janusz Tazbir die „Krise des 17. Jahrhunderts“ für die polnisch-litauische Republik in einem breiten Kontext. Er beginnt mit einer Darstellung der politischen Krise zu Beginn des Jahrhunderts, die der Magnatenoligarchie den Weg ebnete, und endet mit einer Darstellung der Symptome der Krise im Bereich des sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Lebens, der Kultur, der Mentalität und konfessioneller Fragen in der zweiten Hälfte des Jahrhunderts, teilweise als Folge der Kriege von 1648–1667. Das Kapitel von Emanuel Rostworowski ist entscheidend und wichtig für unser Thema in dieser Synthese. Obwohl er das 18. Jahrhundert traditionell in „sächsische Zeiten“ und „Stanislaus-Zeiten“ unterteilt (nach dem Namen des letzten Königs Stanisław August Poniatowski), führt er für diese beiden Epochen eine aufschlussreiche Analyse sozialer und zivilisatorischer Fragen durch, die es ihm ermöglichte, den positiven Trend des Wandels in der zweiten Hälfte des Jahrhunderts zu erfassen. Was die politische Geschichte betrifft, so formulierte Rostworowski einen Begriff, der in die polnische und ausländische, vor allem deutsche Geschichtsschreibung Eingang gefunden hat, nämlich den Begriff der „Souveränitätskrise“.[29] Er stellte fest, dass sich die polnisch-litauische Republik bereits während des Krieges mit Schweden 1655–1660 am Rande einer solchen Krise befand, aber im frühen 18. Jahrhundert infolge des Großen Nordischen Krieges (1700–1721) in eine chronische Souveränitätskrise geriet. Hintergrund war die Herausbildung eines Dominanzsystems der fünf Großmächte in Europa im 18. Jahrhundert als Folge des Nordischen Krieges und des Krieges um die spanische Erbfolge (1702–1714): Frankreich, England, Österreich, Russland und Preußen. In diesem Zusammenhang waren selbst Reformversuche in den letzten Jahrzehnten des 18. Jahrhunderts „unter zaristischer Obhut“ möglich, und unabhängig voneinander durchgeführte Reformen des so genannten Vierjährigen Sejm (1788–1792) endeten im „Kampf gegen [äußere] Gewalt“.[30]

Alle zitierten Synthesen aus den 1970er-Jahren, die von der damals sehr intensiven Entwicklung der polnischen Geschichtsschreibung zeugen, wurden vor der Wende 1989 geschrieben. Das Jahr 1989 war in erster Linie ein politischer Durchbruch, aber – eine offensichtliche Binsenweisheit – es war auch ein wichtiger kultureller Durchbruch, auch im Hinblick auf die Geschichtsschreibung. Doch schon vor oder während dieses Durchbruchs wurden zwei wichtige Publikationen zu den Teilungen veröffentlicht, eine deutsche und

[27] Wyczański 1979: Die genauen Eckdaten dieses Kapitels, insbesondere das Anfangsdatum, werden in diesem Fall nicht angegeben.

[28] Tazbir 1979; Rostworowski 1979.

[29] Rostworowski 1979: 295–296.

[30] Dies sind die Titel zwei Unterkapitel: 3. Die Reformversuche unter zaristischer Obhut. 6. Der Kampf gegen Gewalt: Rostworowski 1979: 319, 359.

eine polnische Studie zu diesem Thema.[31] Das nicht besonders umfangreiche Buch von Michael G. Müller war von großer Bedeutung, weil es auf dem internationalen Markt erschien, den umfangreichen Stand der Forschung und der Diskussionen über die Teilungen und den Zusammenbruch des polnisch-litauischen Staates sammelte und zusammenfasste. Müller schrieb die Teilungen vor allem in einen gesamteuropäischen Kontext ein, betonte die Bedeutung externer Faktoren, die zum Zusammenbruch der polnisch-litauischen Republik führten (in diesem Bereich war Müller ein Fortsetzender seines Meisters Klaus Zernack), und polemisierte auch mit bestimmten etablierten Auffassungen, die die Teilungen rechtfertigten, darunter mit der seit dem 18. Jahrhundert verbreiteten Ansicht (etwas im Geiste der „Krakauer Schule") des „selbstverschuldeten Untergang".[32] Nach dieser Auffassung war das System des polnisch-litauischen Commonwealth im 18. Jahrhundert ein Anachronismus und hatte keine Chance, den Monarchien des aufgeklärten Absolutismus entgegenzutreten. Die mangelnde Anpassung des Systems an das „optimale" System der absoluten Monarchie sollte die Schuld der Polen, der Bürger der Republik, sein. In einem viel umfassenderen, an den polnischen Leser gerichteten Buch von Tadeusz Cegielski und Łukasz Kądziela wurden die Überlegungen und Konzepte von Michael G. Müller in gewisser Weise fortgeführt, darunter „insbesondere die Idee, dass die Hauptursachen der Teilungen außerhalb der internen Krise der Republik gesucht werden sollten".[33]

Die Wende von 1989 eröffnete neue Perspektiven auch in der Forschung zur Geschichte der ehemaligen polnisch-litauischen Republik. Zum einen erhielt man breiteren Zugang zu den Archiven der ehemaligen Sowjetunion, zum anderen beteiligten sich Historiker aus den Ländern, die einst das Gebiet der großen Republik Polen bildeten, d. h. neben Polen auch aus der Ukraine, Litauen und Weißrussland, an der Forschung und Diskussion über die Geschichte des polnisch-litauischen Staates. Es wird nachdrücklich betont, dass die Geschichte des „polnisch-litauischen Commonwealth" nicht nur die Geschichte Polens und möglicherweise Litauens, sondern auch die Geschichte von Weißrussland und der Ukraine ist. Auf der anderen Seite hatte der Fall der alten Republik weitreichende Folgen für diese Nationen.

In den nach 1989 veröffentlichten Synthesen der modernen Geschichte Polens ist dieser Aspekt natürlich sichtbar. In den beiden umfangreichsten und wahrscheinlich wichtigsten, die bereits im 21. Jahrhundert veröffentlicht wurden, von Mariusz Markiewicz (2004) und Urszula Augustyniak (2008), kann man einen klaren Schwerpunkt auf die innere Geschichte, die politische Struktur, die Institutionen, die Gesellschaft und die Kultur erkennen. Diese beiden Werke haben im Übrigen eine ähnliche Struktur, die aus zwei grundlegenden Teilen besteht, von denen der erste den Strukturen und der zweite den politischen Ereignissen gewidmet ist. In Markiewicz' Werk trägt der erste Teil den Titel:

[31] Müller 1984; Cegielski und Kądziela 1990.

[32] Müller 1984: 69–80.

[33] Cegielski und Kądziela 1990: 4.

„Zivilisation. Kultur“, bei Augustyniak: „Staat – Gesellschaft – Kultur“. Der zweite Teil hat im Werk von Markiewicz eine eher neutrale, „monarchische“ oder „dynastische“ Struktur, die Kapitel sind betitelt: „Die Herrschaft der Jagiellonen“, „Die ersten Interregna und die ersten Wahlkönige“, „Die Wasas auf dem polnischen Thron“, „Die Könige – Landsleute“, „Die sächsische Zeit“, „Der letzte König der Republik“. Im Buch von Urszula Augustyniak wird die Struktur nach ähnlich neutral betitelten ersten zwei Kapiteln („Die Entstehung der Wahlmonarchie“; „Monarchie der ersten beiden Wasas“) ab 1648 dynamischer: „Zeit der Krise und des Wiederaufbaus [1648–1696]“, „Der Kampf um die Wahrung der Souveränität [1697–1763]“, „Der Untergang der Republik Polen [1763–1795]“.

Parallel zur Synthese von Markiewicz und Augustyniak wurde von einer internationalen Autorengruppe eine deutsche Synthese erarbeitet. Sein Band über die Frühe Neuzeit erschien schließlich 2017.[34] Der Abschnitt, der der politischen Geschichte gewidmet ist, besteht aus vier Kapiteln: „Die Ständemonarchie der späten Jagiellonenzeit (1506–1572)“, „Die Durchsetzung der ständischen Republik (1573–1609)“, „Unionsstaatliche Großmachtpolitik (bis 1700)“, „„Souveränitätskrise““. Obwohl das Jahr 1700 als letzte Zäsur im vorletzten Kapitel angegeben wird, endet es mit einem Unterabschnitt, der der sächsisch-polnischen Union und der Katastrophe des Großen Nordischen Krieges gewidmet ist. Das letzte Kapitel mit dem Titel des von Emanuel Rostworowski vorgeschlagenen Begriffs beginnt de facto ab 1717, endet aber (nach der Erörterung der Teilungen) mit zwei Unterkapiteln, die den sozialen und kulturellen Transformationen im polnisch-litauischen Staat und in der polnischen Gesellschaft im 18. Jahrhundert gewidmet sind („Soziale Schichtung und Tendenzen des sozialen Wandels in Polen-Litauen am Ende des Ancien Régime“; „Gesellschaft und Öffentlichkeit im 18. Jahrhundert“).

Sowohl die Synthese von Mariusz Markiewicz als auch die von Urszula Augustyniak haben den gleichen Titel: „Historia Polski“ (Geschichte Polens). Auch die deutsche Synthese hat im Titel „Polen“. Eine Neuheit in diesem Bereich – der Titel – ist das im Jahr 2000 erschienene Buch von Andrzej Sulima Kamiński, dessen Titel in gewisser Weise die Veränderungen widerspiegelt, die nach 1989 beim Blick auf die Geschichte des ehemaligen polnisch-litauischen Staates zu beobachten waren: „Geschichte der Republik vieler Nationen“. Kamiński betrachtet die polnisch-litauische Republik als eine Staatsstruktur, in der es Bedingungen für die Bildung einer Zivilgesellschaft mit sehr modernen Merkmalen gab. Seine Sicht auf die Geschichte des polnisch-litauischen Staates ist recht positiv. In diesem Zusammenhang ist es interessant, zu fragen, ob und inwieweit die Struktur seines Buches kritische oder Krisenmomente widerspiegelt, die zum endgültigen Zusammenbruch des Reiches führen. Das Buch besteht aus sieben Kapiteln mit recht überraschenden Titeln: „Aufbau eines modernen Zivilstaates (1505–1572)“, „Herstellung eines Machtgleichgewichts (1572–1609)“, „Sarmatischer Traum von Macht und Frieden (1609–1648)“, „Verteidigung von Freiheit und Souveränität (1648–1668)“,

[34] Bömelburg 2017.

„Unter der Macht von ‚Landsleuten'. Gescheiterter Versuch der nationalen Effizienz (1669–1696)", „Polnisch-sächsische Union (1697–1763)", „In der Umlaufbahn Russlands (1764–1795)". Erst die Analyse der Kapiteletitel zeigt, dass Kamiński eine gewisse Wende in der Geschichte des polnisch-litauischen Commonwealth im 17. Jahrhundert sieht. Es ist jedoch schwer zu sagen, dass bei der Beschreibung des 18. Jahrhunderts der Niedergang betont wurde. Der Begriff „Untergang des Staates" erscheint als Teil des Titels des letzten Unterkapitels im letzten Kapitel. Im vorletzten Unterkapitel dieses Kapitels, das dem Kościuszko Aufstand von 1794 gewidmet ist, finden wir jedoch eine aussagekräftige Beschreibung dieses Aufstands: „Der Kampf für Freiheit, Souveränität und eine neue Nation". Wir können also sagen, dass der Zusammenbruch des Staates in seiner alten Form durch eine neue Öffnung der Nationalgeschichte ausgeglichen wird.

6 Zusammenfassung

Der Niedergang der polnisch-litauischen Republik und die Teilungen dieses Reiches im 18. Jahrhundert sind selbstverständlich immer noch Gegenstand der wissenschaftlichen, aber nicht nur der wissenschaftlichen Diskussion.

Die wichtigsten Fragen wurden zwar im Wesentlichen schon vor der Wende 1989 in den Synthesen der polnischen Geschichte und in den Arbeiten über die Teilungen gelöst. Auch wenn einige Autoren die Anfänge der Schwäche praktisch schon zu Beginn der Existenz der Republik Polen oder zumindest in der Zeit der innenpolitischen Krise zu Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts sahen, so ermöglichte das Potenzial von Staat und Gesellschaft die Überwindung des akuten Zusammenbruchs in der Mitte dieses Jahrhunderts und eine eigenständige, obwohl, wenn es um eventuelle Expansion geht, ineffektive Außenpolitik in der zweiten Hälfte des Jahrhunderts. Es ist jedoch wichtig, dass dieses Potenzial und die innere Lage im Reich keine Transformation in dem Geist zuließen, in dem die meisten europäischen Länder transformiert wurden, d. h. absolute Monarchien, die die Ressourcen des Landes effektiv für eine aktive Außenpolitik nutzten. Das bedeutete, dass der polnisch-litauische Staat im 18. Jahrhundert nicht danach streben konnte, eine wichtige europäische Macht zu werden, und der unglückliche Verlauf des Großen Nordischen Krieges versetzte ihn in eine, wie Emanuel Rostworowski es nannte, „Souveränitätskrise". Dieser Zustand erwies sich im Laufe des Jahrhunderts als chronisch, und in den letzten Jahrzehnten des 18. Jahrhunderts, insbesondere nach der ersten Teilung (1772), fiel der polnisch-litauische Staat in den Rang eines russischen Protektorats. Ein auf die stattfindenden sozialen, wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Wandlungen Transformationen basierender Versuch, aus diesem Stand an der Wende von 1780er und 1790er auszubrechen, führte zu zwei weiteren Teilungen und zur endgültigen Liquidierung des polnisch-litauischen Staates im Jahr 1795.

Die Situation, die nach dem Durchbruch von 1989 entstanden ist, gibt jedoch Anlass zu weiteren Forschungen und Diskussionen, da ein breiter Zugang zu Archiven in der

ehemaligen Sowjetunion besteht und Historiker aus anderen Ländern, die die polnisch-litauische Republik bildeten (wie Litauen, Weißrussland, die Ukraine), in die Forschung und Diskussion einbezogen wurden. Dies ermöglichte eindeutig ein vertieftes Studium der Geschichte des polnisch-litauischen Staates, seiner internen Strukturen und seiner Politik.[35] Das bedeutet aber natürlich auch die Eröffnung neuer Diskussionsfelder. Die Diskussionen werden zu verschiedenen Themen geführt. Es ist zu beachten, dass sie gerade in Polen oft mit einer weitreichenden Faszination für die Geschichte der alten Republik und deren Idealisierung verbunden sind. Zum Teil kann dies als eine Reaktion auf die oft kritischen Einschätzungen des polnisch-litauischen Staates in der Geschichtsschreibung nach 1945 gesehen werden. Die Diskussionen über die ehemalige polnisch-litauische Republik sind aber auch ein Beitrag zur Diskussion über den heutigen polnischen Staat, der sich nach dem Fall des Kommunismus 1989 entwickelte.

Unabhängig davon wird die Intensität der Forschung der letzten drei Jahrzehnte höchstwahrscheinlich bald zu einer allgemeinen Debatte über das Wesen des ehemaligen polnisch-litauischen Staatenbundes und die Ursachen und Mechanismen seines Zusammenbruchs führen. Diese Debatte ändert vielleicht nicht grundlegend die Feststellungen der 1970er- und 1980er-Jahre, aber sie wird das Bild dieser Erscheinungen und Prozesse sicherlich bereichern.

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Part VI

The End of World War I

Structural Problems, Personal Failure or Just Contingency? The End of the Russian Empire

Matthias Stadelmann

It is only with difficulties that historians can resist the temptation to write history from its end. If one takes the Russian Revolution of 1917 as endpoint of the epoch of the Petersburg Empire, then in the opinion of a critical structural history the breakdown of the Romanovs' realm seems to be inevitable.[1] Already in the nineteenth century everywhere fatal shortcomings in state, economy and society could be observed: a half-hearted reform policy; a stubborn adherence to autocracy and social inequality; a consistent denial of political participation—these and other shortcomings led, according this approach, to the unavoidable collapse of 1917.

Although the historiographical judgement concentrates on the decades directly preceding the 1917 revolution, the experienced historian's eye recognizes serious deficiencies and omissions already in earlier phases of the nineteenth century: Be it the unrealized constitution of Alexander I. who in 1815 pleased the Poles, ruled in personal union by the Russian Emperor, with a constitution, but who denied such a fundamental charter to his "own" Russian subjects; be it the purported police state regime of Europe's "Gendarme" Nikolai I, who ruled his realm not least on the basis of a seemingly omnipresent secret police, spied out his population and pressed his subjects into the ideological corset of "autocracy, orthodoxy and popular character [narodnost]"; be it the apparently half-hearted reforms

[1] Influential contributions to this argumentation: Haimson (1964a-1965, b-1965), Laue (1965), Geyer (1968), Hosking (1974), Geyer (1977), McDaniel (1988), Waldron (1988), Haimson (2000), Cf. also Bonwetsch (1991).

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of the "Tsar-liberator" Alexander II, who allowed changes only with the objective of strengthening his autocratic position, who freed the peasants so subtly that they almost did not realize it, who still privileged the upper classes, implemented the rule of law in Russia with numerous loopholes and rejected substantial political participation of society throughout his life; or be it Alexander III., often scolded as a simpleton, who never understood the purpose and meaning of his father's reforms and whose own program limited itself to containing the pernicious reform spirit.[2]

Russian autocracy all the more seemed to be a hopeless case, as at all times the paradigm of "backwardness" coined many assessments of the country. From western perspective Russia always seemed to be in the slow lane, without the political will and the societal possibilities to keep up with Europe's well-advanced political nations and systems. Even when historiography bestowed their sympathy on modernizing eighteenth century rulers like Peter I. or Catherine II—the huge, underdeveloped, only partially accessible country with its uneducated 95 % of population prevented any success of the rare benevolent reforming intentions.[3]

In stating a hopeless case western and Soviet scholars in principle agreed, which on closer inspection is not surprising: The Bolsheviks were inspired by a concept of past, present and future which had emerged in Western Europe; they complemented the Marxist ideas with a fanatical hatred against the system they wanted to destroy. This constellation did not allow for a differentiated consideration of prerevolutionary Russia. As a consequence, Soviet historians offered rather one-dimensional explanations for the Tsarist breakdown: The revolutionary forces of the people had, under the instruction of cognizant Marxist intellectuals, brought down the Romanov bloodsuckers and hereby fulfilled an imperative need, prescribed by Marxist "law". That Russia did not fully match the Marxist preconditions for revolutions did not bother the Bolsheviks—neither when making (their own October) revolution nor when explaining the fall of tsardom.[4]

Western research was, after all, more differentiated: It did not by definition analyze the structural conditions of the Russian Empire through Lenin's glasses. Out of this several points can be stated which in a "moyenne durèe" certainly contributed to the 1917 breakdown. The *first part* of this article will briefly remind those structural problems. Those who did not want to condemn monarchy lock, stock and barrel, located the reasons for the sudden collapse in specific personal factors. From this point of view autocratic Russia was not doomed to breakdown for structural reasons, but was led into collapse by fatal errors of an incapable ruler within an ignorant court and government environment—

[2]For an overview on the history of Russia in the nineteenth century see i.a. Hildermeier (2013): 695–1346; Lieven (2006), Polunov (2005), Saunders (1992), Schramm (1983); With a rather pessimistic approach: Seton-Watson (1954), Seton-Watson 1967; Rogger (1983), Hosking (2003).

[3]For the paradigm of "backwardness" in Russian history see e.g. Gerschenkron (1966), Gatrell (1986), Hildermeier (1987), Löwe (1987), Gregory (1994), Hildermeier (2013): 1313ff.; Feest and Häfner (2016).

[4]As a representative example: Mints (1966).

these considerations make up the *second part* of the article. A *third part* argues that neither structural nor personal factors should be regarded in a deterministic manner. For this some accomplishments and perspectives of the constitutionalizing autocracy will be sounded out. The conclusion will ask for the role of contingencies and the dynamics of events for the fate of the Tsarist Empire.

1 Structural Deficits of the Russian Empire

Be it economy, society or politics—historical analysis found numerous starting points in the nineteenth century Russian Empire that can be used for middle or long term explanations for the 1917 revolution. In socio-economic respect first of all the rural majority of the population moves on the agenda. Roughly divided into estate, crown and state peasants they mostly shared ways of living that considerably differed from those of the nobility and the city. Basically faithful to the Tsar and self-sufficient, they considered noble landowners their main adversaries that prevented a calm flourishing of the peasantry. Central "political" issue of the peasants for decades was—land, to be precise: more land. The abolition of serfdom, announced in 1861, did nothing to change this: Its regulations were complicated, its implementation protracted, the land to be received from the peasant's point of view undersized—and to make matters worse, the peasants even had to pay for it.

How persistently the land issues held sway over Russia's peasantry and how much they encouraged loyal rural subjects to become determined revolutionaries gets clear with hindsight in the revolutions of 1905 and 1917: In both cases the upheavals had begun in the city and expanded quickly to the countryside. The peasants were driven by the perspective to appropriate land that had remained undeservedly with the nobility, the church or the state.

The chance to participate at last in a great redistribution desired for a long time carried away even those peasants who still in 1917 in principle did not have anything against tsardom. That the peasants hereby gave way to a certain self-deception—before the revolution they possessed already more than 70% of the not state-owned land—did not change the enormous power of the discourse about the seeming landlessness.[5]

The second serious socio-economic structural problem was no specific Russian one—the urban worker proletariat emerging from industrialization. Massively promoted by the state Russia's economy was catching up on developments of the European industrial age since the second half of the nineteenth century. That the well-known negative social side effects appeared to be particularly striking in Russia had specific reasons: The rapid tempo on the one hand, the origin of most of the workers from the rural countryside to which they stayed in tense connections over generations on the other. While the family at first often

[5] Hildermeier (2013): 1133; Neutatz (2013): 133; See also Gatrell (1986), Moritsch (1986), Shanin (1985–1986), Löwe (1987), Moon (1999).

remained in the village, the workers received poor pay, lived in horrible doss houses and faced inhuman working conditions. Since the 1880s the state intervened in the relations of employers and workers, but the regulations in the interests of the workers remained spartan. Russia's workers continued to be disadvantaged social strata that became susceptible to radical socialist concepts after the turn of the century. Tsar and authorities gave them little attention, but a lot of contempt. That the workers of the capital decisively contributed to the end of the Russian Empire by their uncompromising uproar in 1917, had a rather compelling prehistory of about 25 years.[6]

Part of this picture is also the—maybe a little sweeping and emotional, but nevertheless important—observation that probably in no country of that era the social contradictions between top and bottom, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, Europeanized and non-Europeanized were so great as in Russia. Petersburg's industrials workers on the one and peasants on the other hand and those members of the bourgeoisie and the nobility that inhabited the imperial center were worlds apart—the material and mental differences were bigger than in many other countries. The peasants were separated from the wealthy world of the Europeanized and educated; Russia's urban lower classes never were coopted into the autocratic system, they remained alien to the social and political elite, which surely was true vice versa. The fact that for centuries there had not been a significant urban bourgeois middle class which could have served as intermediary or even as role model for the workers reinforced that antagonism. The Russian proletariat never wanted to listen much about bourgeois constitutionalism, neither before the revolution nor after. Instead it immediately created its own grassroots-democratic institutions, in which radical solutions to all problems were negotiated.

This enormous social divide, of course, had its impact on political participation. In the nineteenth century the narrow paths of political influence were almost exclusively reserved for the nobility; also, when in 1864 institutions of local self-administration were created, which were made up of elected deputies from society, the upper strata were tremendously privileged. In state administration a frequently corrupt and inefficient command structure prevailed which also was shaped by social origin and the reliability of which declined with increasing distance from the imperial center.[7]

It is hardly astonishing that census suffrage for Russia's first parliament, the Duma, was highly unequal. On the contrary, when even this unequal suffrage did not bring about the expected results, the imperial government implemented an electoral law reform which came close to a coup d'état. As a result, the numerically small group of the propertied and loyal upper strata received a solid preponderance in parliament. Thus cooperation between government and Duma was considerably facilitated in comparison with the first two more

[6]Cf. among others: Johnson (1979), Engelstein (1982), Bonnell (1983), McKean (1990), Puttkamer (1996), Hildermeier (2013): 1183ff.; Pearl (2015).

[7]Cf. Emmons and Vucinich (2011), Porter (1991), Baberowski (1996), Gaudin (2007), Schattenberg (2008).

"leftist" Dumas, but Russia's new constitutional setting paid a high price: The vote of a landowner counted 500 times as much as a worker's vote. Russia certainly had no "feigned constitutionalism" (Scheinkonstitutionalismus), as Max Weber had put it, but a very unequal constitutionalism. The lower classes were continuously deprived of truly influential possibilities of policy making within the Russian monarchy. Neither workers nor peasants were politically integrated into the autocracy in a sustainable way. Why should they have defended this imperial rule in 1917? It should bring about momentous consequences in the year of revolution that Russia's lower social strata had been denied the practice of parliamentary patterns. The possible benefits of parliamentary democracy did not become accessible to them, the appeal of simple and radical slogans, in contrast, did.[8]

2 The Personal Factor

In an autocracy, and also in the constitutionalized autocracy after 1906, it is out of the question, that the emperor himself decisively influences the developments of political events—a political history of Russia before the Revolution cannot be written without considering its emperor, the question why Imperial Russia collapsed cannot be answered without the role of Nicholas II. But the tragedy of personal factors in Russian imperial rule began much earlier. If one argues dynastically, there can be determined two tragic fateful years already in the nineteenth century: 1865 the equally intelligent and liberal heir to the throne, Nikolai Aleksandrovich, who should have succeeded his father Aleksandr II., died at the age of 21. His place was taken by his neither intelligent nor liberal brother Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, who should ascend the throne as Aleksandr III. That he was able to do this already in 1881, a little earlier than expected, was due to the assassination of his father by revolutionary terrorists. Lacking any understanding for the political achievements of his father, the latter's assassination made him stop the autocratic reform policy. Since 1881 Russian autocracy reacted to its structural problems mentioned above only in one-dimensional ways: reinforcement of autocratic competence, consolidation of the position of the state-supporting nobility and an overall policy of a heavy hand.[9]

Surely, Aleksandr II was an autocrat by conviction, too, and the reforms initiated in his era had the aim to strengthen and save autocracy by reacting to imperative challenges. Nevertheless Aleksandr's reign induced great changes: The liberation of the serfs might have been bothersome, long-winded and not too generous towards the peasants, but its interference in the age-old traditions of social law was an epoch-making act. The following reforms met the significance of the liberation act: the participation of society in local

[8] Cf. Ascher (1988–1992), Hildermeier (1989), Neutatz (2008), Hildermeier (2013): 962ff.

[9] Cf. Stadelmann (2008), Verbitskaya (2010), Stadelmann (2011a), Rogger (1983), Zaionchkovsky (1976).

administration, the establishment of independent rule of law in jurisdiction, an ambitious reform of education, a universal conscription for all social classes. In the early 1880s, shortly before the assassination of Aleksandr II, Russia's government was preparing a kind of proto-constitutional scenario involving advisory deputies from different layers of society in legislation. A reforming emperor like Aleksandr II ruling longer or a liberally acculturated successor like Nikolai Aleksandrovich being spellbound by his uncle Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, the great liberal-autocratic statesman of the reform era, would have had more ambitious and more appropriate concepts for Russia's future political development than the immobile and restrictive Aleksandr III.[10]

The latter, however, passed on his limited horizon to his successor Nikolai II. Although today Russia's last Tsar has become rather popular and estimated, especially in the environment of the Orthodox Church canonizing him in 2000, for sober historians he remains a rather problematic character who often has been blamed as main responsible person for the breakdown of the Russian Empire. In contrast to his father Nikolai was uncertain and weak-minded, a monarchical incapacity, for which he compensated over time with a retrograde, at times difficult to understand stubbornness. Of course, he was said to be a great family man and an excellent, well-learned interlocutor. But about politics or more precisely the challenges his empire faced he had no—or at best one-dimensional and inappropriate—ideas. Current workers' needs, peasants' aspirations, liberal intelligentsia's requests had no place in Nikolai's romantic phantasies about the "golden times" of seventeenth century, when Tsar and people allegedly lived in an unclouded symbiotic relationship willed by God.

For the workers that wanted to demonstrate in January 1905 for better working and living conditions and were shot down in St. Petersburg by imperial troops Nikolai felt contempt and anger. He did not get the idea that the tragic events could, against the background of accumulated lower class discontent, lead to a revolutionary situation. Not until the country was in flames, did Nikolai agree to make those concessions which gave Russia a basic law and, subsequently, a parliament in1906. The Tsar never made a secret of his aversion to these settlements and of his contempt for the Duma. His sole consolation in this case was that the constitution, enacted by him, still gave a strong position to the ruler. When he wanted, Nikolaj could, in co-operation with a loyal prime-minister, temporarily bypass the Duma by issuing emergency decrees.

Nikolai's indifference towards the problems of his time, his captivity in elite court circles, the big influence his even more retrograde spouse had on him, the bizarre spectacle with the holy court charlatan Rasputin, the obvious denial of cooperation with other political forces, even during the war—all this discredited the Emperor and with him dynasty and monarchy. That Nikolai in 1915 felt obliged to assume supreme command in a burdensome and costly war, made things even worse: On the one hand the Tsar from

[10]Cf. Lincoln (1990), Eklof et al. (1994), Nikolaev (2005), Carrère d'Encausse (2008), Lyashenko (2010), Stadelmann (2011b), Stadelmann (2012).

then on was personal part of military failure, on the other hand society suspected that in the capital the "German" Empress and her camarilla were all the more in charge.[11]

There is no doubt that Nikolai had his considerable share in the breakdown of Tsarist rule in Russia, because he stubbornly ignored the imperatives of his time. The great problem with this was neither that Nikolai was no dynamic doer nor that he had conservative ideas of "Holy Russia". What mattered was that he threw perspectives and opportunities of adjusting autocracy to twentieth century to the winds. In doing so he snubbed and alienated those people to whom empire and imperial rule actually were close to their hearts, but who wanted a political design appropriate for the twentieth century. In such a time of great challenges for Russia the small-minded and visionless Nikolai II was the wrong person at the wrong time in the wrong place. By reacting in a flexible and forward-looking way he could have stood the severe tests of socio-economic and political change. He failed—and Russian tsardom with him.

3 A Hopeless Case? Russia's Perspectives Before the Revolution

In the light of the outlined structural problems and the apparent miscast on the throne one might be tempted to take the collapse of 1917 for unavoidable indeed. But such a point of view overlooks that in spite of unfavorable circumstances a lot had been launched in Russia since the nineteenth century. The reforms of Aleksandr II. were already mentioned above. In my opinion their significance for Russia's potential cannot be overestimated—despite various supposed inconsistencies they irreversibly pointed the way to a modern, reliable and norm-based state and a society which certainly was to be unequal and heterogeneous for a long time, but which for the first time perceived the idea of basic equal rights as a distant vision.

Even under both last Tsars, although they were little or not at all avid for reform, Russia went through groundbreaking developments: Not only, as often acknowledged, in the industrial-economic sector, where Russia after a recession between 1900 and 1907 came again into prosperous flourishing. Before World War I Russia was not bad off in economic respects.[12]

The political development was assessed less optimistically by the majority of historians and yet—a considerable dynamism got going in this field, too. Although reluctantly, Nikolai II. gave a constitution to his subjects, which initiated an impressive change in the sphere of politics. Long since historians have stopped parroting Max Weber's dictum: Russia did not have a "Scheinkonstitutionalismus" since 1906, but, due to the newly

[11] Cf. Lieven (1993), Ferro (1991), Troyat (1992), Carrère d'Encausse (1998), Massie (1992), Stadelmann (2008): 213ff.; Erickson (2001), Moynahan (1997), Smith (2017), Moe (2011).

[12] Cf. Gregory (1982), Gregory (1994), Gatrell (1986), Mironov and Eklof (2000), Hildermeier (2013): 1139ff.

designed political, particularly legislative life, a rapidly and drastically changing political culture.[13] Now the populace sent elected deputies to a legislative body. Thereby not only the politically experienced and ambitious upper strata of aristocrats, educational professions and entrepreneurs did take part, but also, in each case with its own characteristics and, as already stated, under unequal conditions, the peasantry and the urban lower classes, mostly in cooperation with socialist parties. The latter fact, by the way, was of no minor importance, too: parties of all colors emerged, politics were discussed in public, disparate views were negotiated. Now it was possible and legitimate to have another opinion than his Majesty, the Tsar, and the press, which likewise boomed, carried the political competition into a newly emerging political public sphere. "Politics became public and [...] subject of compromise-oriented interchange of opinions and interests." The path to "the possibility of an evolutionary transformation of the political order was taken".[14] At this point we neither have to talk about all the loopholes and prerogatives of imperial power that existed further on nor about the point that the sometimes rather straight-line and concrete lower class expectations for some kind of "immediate aid" by parliament time and again were disappointed. All these problems of the newly established Duma do not alter the fact that with the constitution a new political era had begun in Russia, an era, which would have deserved more time to develop than the great war of 1914 allowed.

This is all the more true, as political change merged with tendencies of social emancipation and activation. Already from the 1890s on a significant increase of associations, clubs and other organizational structures of civil society could be observed, after 1906 the number of new formations rocketed. Particularly urban society more and more wanted to get involved in regulation and shaping of its everyday world: The subjects of the Tsar were anything but a will- and visionless mass of minions, which became increasingly apparent since the end of the nineteenth century. "Clubs and associations that formed as a consequence of social change and diversification in the Tsarist Empire, too, practiced civil society virtues."[15] While doing so, they got numerous suggestions and ideas from Western Europe. The same applied, by the way, to the heavily promoted expansion of urban infrastructure and architectural design. The fantastic achievements of Russian high culture of that time, be it in music, literature or painting, bespeak, notwithstanding certain idiosyncratic characteristics, a self-confident, manifold intertwining with the epoch-making trends of Europe and the world. Russia's cities and their middle and upper strata were long since heading for the accomplishments of "progressive" countries.[16]

[13] Cf. Weber (1906).

[14] Hildermeier (2013): 1336; Cf. also Hagen (1982), Neutatz (2008), Leontovitsch (2012).

[15] Hildermeier (2013): 1338.

[16] Cf. Hausmann (2002), Hildermeier (2003), Häfner (2004), Goehrke (2003): 290ff.; Koshman (2008), Hildermeier (2013): 1157ff.

As far as the lower classes are concerned, much was, as mentioned above, in a sorry state. The Russian governments, however, knew about that: In 1903 some kind of accident insurance was established, after 1906 trade unions were allowed to form up, and in 1912 medical insurance for workers was introduced. At the end of 1906 the government initiated an ambitious reform program, considered long since, for a radical change of conditions in the countryside. Prime Minister Stolypin wanted to give a chance to the peasants, who in economic respects mostly acted in outdated, self-sufficient ways, to become modern farmers. From now on, peasants were able to leave the traditional collective village community and to act individually and independently. The development of new, prospering peasant households in the vast ranges of Siberia was part of Stolypin's concept, too. The program had a long-term focus, Stolypin himself calculated with a lasting change in the course of 2–3 decades. Nevertheless, already in the first years a lively participation began to emerge: Until 1915 more than a quarter of all Russian peasants had applied for the conversion of their share in collective community lands into hereditary property.[17]

Politics, society, economy—the examples mentioned in these fields may be enough at this point to state that Russia was in dynamic flux in the first decades of the twentieth century, that far-reaching transformations had been initiated, but that a longer period of peace and tranquility would have been necessary: The innovations not only had to be put into practice, but they needed time to produce durable results.

Nikolai II acted, as stated above, in an unfortunate and often wrong manner, but this did not trigger an automatism of revolution. The Russian Empire had overcome other, likewise less gifted rulers. Nikolai did his job in the way he understood it; his aim was to serve Russia's weal, and thereby he mostly took extremely conservative paths ignoring realities and challenges of his time. In difficult times Russia had a weak emperor who discredited dynastic rule indeed. But we must not overlook as well that although the emperor held a central position and wide-ranging competences, the constitution of 1906 and the increasing complexity of political and social life contained his influence. Politics and government in Russia after 1906 comprised not only the autocratic court, but were made up of an entangled conglomeration of emperor, aristocracy, dignitaries, bureaucracy, parliament and aspiring social public. Before World War I not only the emperor was responsible for Russia's political setting.

4 Conclusion

These observations lead me to the issue of contingency originating from history of events. There is no doubt that Russia had to fight with several structural shortcomings in politics, economy and society from which correlations can be established with the burdens and events of 1917. And there is even less doubt that Nikolai II was a weak ruler, ill-prepared

[17] Neutatz (2013):64ff., 76ff., 125ff.; Ascher (2001), Williams (2006).

for the manifold challenges of his time. But Russia's troubles became really acute only under the conditions of the First World War that heavily afflicted the population. The welling up patriotic euphoria of 1914 only for a short time belied Russia's incapability to withstand the strenuous war against a German adversary that had long since enhanced military spending and armaments production. Russia's forces rapidly lost ground, soldiers and equipment. Although the country endeavored, it could not compensate the incessant losses at the front. While all efforts were put into the army, the supply situation in the cities became worse and worse, especially amongst the lower strata.

Dissatisfaction prevailed not only among the workers: The liberal-constitutional milieu was annoyed about the course of the war and especially the performance of Tsarist government as well. An oppositional united front against autocracy, however, did not evolve. The liberal and moderate conservative nobility and bourgeoisie demanded more political rights and participation in the system, more consideration of societal concerns and the end of elitist political encapsulation of government and court. It was their firm conviction that only that way Russia could survive the war. The urban lower classes, on the contrary, fought for material survival and expressed their hardships by increasingly radically articulated protests in the streets.[18]

From January 1917 on strikes and demonstrations in the industrial and workers' quarters of Petrograd did not come to an end; before long the protesting lower classes reached the capital's imperial center. Extent and effect of the protests surprised all: court and government, police and military, Duma and liberal public, but also the workers themselves and their socialist spokesmen. By the end of February the situation became so critical that representatives of the Duma insistently asked the emperor, who was staying at the front, for political concessions to be able to restore order in the capital. In vain Nikolai ordered to end the nightmare by a forced military operation: In Petrograd too many soldiers already had defected to the insurgents and the loyal front troops were far away from the capital and bound by the German adversary.

In the end, it were probably less the alarming telegrams of Petrograd Duma deputies that motivated Nikolai to abdicate on 2 March 1917, but the influential generals who feared the breakdown of the front, if the inner quarrels continued. The conservative military establishment certainly had not imagined that Nikolai would immediately abdicate for his son, the heir to the throne Aleksei, too, or that the successor designated by the renouncing Nikolai, Grand Duke Mikhail Aleksandrovich, also would give up, after Petrograd Duma members had intimidated him by threat scenarios of emerging revolution und bloodshed. Thus the age-old history of Russian monarchy ended practically overnight, in a situation of critical culmination, overstress and menace. The optimistic atmosphere of departure that captured broad parts of the country after the Romanovs' abdication does not alter the short-

[18]For Russia in the First World war see: Gatrell (2005), Engelstein (2018), Hildermeier (2013): 1059ff.; Haimson (1964a-1965, b-1965), Haimson (2000).

term nature of the regime change. By the way, the libertarian euphoria soon gave way to that disenchantment which was to become the basis of October revolution and civil war.[19]

In an overall view the events despite their explainability can only be described as virtually sensational. Notwithstanding fierce protests and confrontations before and during the war, nobody had thought of a revolution until the beginning of 1917—the overthrow of monarchy was unthinkable. The cause of the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917 was, as simplistic it may sound, the World War with its burdens. Of course, event and structure are intertwined here: That the strains came upon a discontent industrial proletariat which turned Petrograd upside down in the first weeks of 1917 had a long prehistory. That no constitutional monarchy with representational functions for the monarch was established after the overthrow of Tsarist rule, had to do with Nikolai's bad performance, enduring for about 22 years. And that in the end no western-style parliamentary democracy came out, had reasons that reached back much further: The extreme social inequality and injustice as well as the long lacking practice of parliamentary participation.

Nevertheless, we can conclude that Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century was about to change tremendously, to adjust its traditional autocratic form of state and government to the requirements of modernity, and that against this background the great war came at the worst possible time. It's not the job of historians to speculate about constellations that did not come into being, but it does not take too much courage to put forward the thesis, that without the first World War the 1917 revolution(s), the end of the Russian Empire and, at least for a foreseeable period of time, the end of Russian constitutional-autocratic monarchy would not have taken place. The continuity of imperial, politically authoritarian, state concentrated and, federal frameworks notwithstanding, vertically center oriented traditions in the further course of Russian history suggest that the breakup of 1917, shaped by grassroots democracy on the one hand and bourgeois-parliamentary concepts on the other, owed its short-term nature not only to unfortunate circumstances, but deeply ingrained mental dispositions which make a continuation of Tsarist Empire far into the twentieth century anything but a far-fetched historical fantasy.

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[19]For the revolution of 1917 and the civil war see e.g. Hildermeier (1989), Altrichter (1997), Altrichter et al. (2016), Steinberg (2017), McMeekin (2017), Wade (2017), Engelstein (2018).

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The End of the German Empire

Ewald Frie

1 A Short History of the German Empire

To what extent was Imperial Germany truly an empire? The term "German Empire", after all, was initially intended as nothing more than an English translation of *Deutsches Kaiserreich*. The term *Deutscher Kaiser* (German Emperor) had in turn been chosen as the designation for the monarch in 1871, so as to confer some of the legitimacy of the early modern Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation) upon the new nation state. The Holy Roman Empire had, under all but permanent leadership of the Habsburg dynasty indeed been a central European empire, although it must be said that this was indeed a special case and it was never without its idiosyncrasies. Some of these emerged again in 1871. For instance, unlike the Habsburg emperors of the nineteenth century, or the French Emperor Napoleon III, the German Kaiser was not the only ruler in the realm, but rather acted as a king of kings. He was the *primus inter pares* in a circle that included the monarchs of Bavaria, Württemberg, Saxony and Hanover, as well as the many princes of the individual German states who had provided the foundations for the empire according to its constitutional origin myth.

Indeed, even if the construction of the German Empire of 1871 looked similar to the early modern Habsburg Empire, not much was left of its territorial ambitions. The Holy Roman Empire may have been intended to provide a structural defence of the existing peace and legal order, but as they drove back the Turkish armies, the Habsburgs penetrated ever further into Hungary and South-Eastern Europe. After the Congress of Vienna, they

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also gained a strong position in Northern Italy. Still, the extending reach of the Habsburgs and their capital, Vienna, across Southern and South-Eastern Europe was cut off from the German nation state in the wake of the Austro-Prussian war in 1866. By 1871 the Empire had become "kleindeutsch"/"lesser German", i.e. concentrated on compact regions with a German majority. Bordered as it was by multi-national empires to the East and South, and nation states—in some cases with overseas colonies—to the West and North, any ambitions towards continental expansion by the German Empire were effectively rendered impossible. Bismarck learned this the hard way during the "War in Sight" crisis of 1875. Ever since then, he propagated the "Saturation" of the Empire.

Nevertheless, the new Empire (Reich) was not simply a nation state, either. On the one hand, more than 10 million German speakers lived outside its borders, predominantly under the Habsburgs or the Russian Czars. On the other hand, Danish, Polish, Alsatian and Sorbian minorities still resided within the Empire (Reich). The politics pursued in these regions, but especially on the German/Polish border, can be understood in the context of negotiating an "imperial frontier", which implied an overarching imperial policy as well.[1] Still, imperial and national policy need not be mutually exclusive. In the decades following 1871, the German (more than the Prussian) national identity was to grow more cohesive, and became linked to ideas about the Empire, as symbolised by Wilhelm II, the third emperor, and his imperial aspirations.

It should thus come as no surprise that the Empire, despite the fact that a need for self-restraint had been learned in the mid-1870s, started colonizing areas outside of Europe from the mid-1880s onwards. At the same time, increasingly rapid industrialisation allowed German companies, supported by German politics, to expand their economic reach well beyond the borders of the Empire. From the perspective of both national and international politics, a distinction could be drawn between formal rulership over the colonies in Africa and the South Pacific, informal rulership or strong economic influence over South-Eastern Europe and West Asia,[2] and the quasi-colonial statecraft in the east of the Empire. The differences in the practice of exercising rulership were less pronounced, however, than in judicial or political theory.[3]

Around the turn of the century, the extent of neither formal nor informal rulership conformed to the self-perception of the German elites, who wished to translate their perceived scientific, cultural and economic supremacy into a large colonial empire after English and French models. Bernard von Bülow, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs from 1897–1900 and Chancellor of the German Empire from 1900–1909, expressed it thusly in a speech for the Reichstag on 6 December 1897: "We definitely do not feel the need to have a finger in every pie. But we believe it is inadvisable, from the outset, to exclude Germany from competition with other nations in lands with a rich and promising

[1] Lerp (2016).

[2] Gross (2015).

[3] Conrad (2012): 153–168.

future. ("Bravo!") The days when Germans granted one neighbor the earth, the other the sea, and reserved for themselves the sky, where pure doctrine reigns—(Laughter—"Bravo!") those days are over. (...) We are happy to respect the interests of other powers in China, secure in the knowledge that our own interests will also receive the recognition they deserve. ("Bravo!") In short, we do not want to put anyone in our shadow, but we also demand our place in the sun".[4]

During von Bülow's tenure as Chancellor, the Empire increasingly pursued a more prominent—or as German politicians would have it, a more appropriate—role on the global political scene. As such, German economic and cultural policies also grew more and more palpable in the regions to the East and South of the border. Nonetheless, this "Weltpolitik", which in any event came too late to have any success (almost all accessible non-European colonial territories had already been divided), but which was still aimed at preserving a seat at the high table, led to what Hermann Oncken has called a "springende Unruhe" (nervous disposition) in German foreign policy, which kept the other powers in suspense.

During the First World War, the priorities of German imperial and global politics shifted considerably. The colonies were quickly lost. Faced with an efficient allied blockade that doomed the German fleet (the most impressive incarnation of German imperial dreams) to inaction, there was little hope of effectively defending German possessions outside of Europe in the future. Simultaneously, however, the fact that the Western Front had managed to take permanent hold of Belgian and French territories, while the Eastern Front remained highly mobile and penetrated deep into former Russian lands, gave rise to European imperial fantasies, which stemmed from a mixture of economic, nationalist and imperial motives. The global aspirations of the Bülow-era mutated into visions of a continental empire, which announced themselves not only in overly ambitious discussions about the objectives of the war, but also in such books as Friedrich Naumann's *Mitteleuropa*, which appeared in 1915. Then the Russian Empire collapsed in 1917. Suddenly faced with the seemingly endless military possibilities in the East, and against a background of new expressions of differences in the civilisation of various peoples (which are difficult to repeat in the twenty-first century), Eastern Europe, for a brief period, became a boundless "realm of possibilities for German overlordship".[5] So it was that in the Summer of 1918, German troops occupied Baku on the Caspian Lake—even if the defeat in the West meant that this conquest was quickly lost again. Yet, the vision of an Eastern Europe malleable by Germany remained.

The Emperor's regnum ended with a combination of military defeat, a revolution and the abolition of the emperor and the kings at the end of the First World War in November 1918. In 1919, the German colonies in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, which had already been lost, were divided amongst the French and British powers and their sub-imperialists by a

[4] Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstags. IX. Legislaturperiode, V. Session, 1897/98, Bd. 1, Berlin (1898): 60.

[5] Leonhard (2014): 818.

mandate of the League of Nations. Still, even without emperors, kings or colonies, the constitution of the Weimar Republic continued to refer to the "Deutsches Reich". Unlike the Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Empires, the German Empire persisted, precisely because, unlike its unlucky neighbours in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, it had been founded as a nation state which subsequently turned into an imperial state. During the Revolution of 1918, conflicts over power or social issues were not ethnically charged. The Empire did not buckle under the weight of nationalist rhetoric. The Reich survived military defeat not despite, but because of the successful Revolution of 1918, even if it took a lot of effort and was the result of under-appreciated efforts by the party politicians of the Weimar Republic. With it, the desire to rekindle the Empire also lived on, although the revolutionary social democrats, who, bolstered by their electoral victory in 1919 leading to the Weimar Coalition, were not really interested in these aspirations. Throughout the 1920s, however, National Liberals, conservatives and those on the extreme right clung to their vision of empire, which, according to them, not only stood for economic strength, political stability and the suppression of the political Left, but also for its imperial power.

Time and again, the unclear fate of millions of German speakers outside the borders was brought up in this context. Deviating from the otherwise highly regarded ideal of self-determination, the victorious forces had blocked the incorporation of German Austria by stating that they would not want to reward the defeated Germans by granting them new territories—an argument that was understandable against the background of the heated national fervour among participants in the War. "Grenz- und Auslandsdeutsche", Germans living abroad or on the border, no longer belonged to any Empire, but were also unable to develop a national identity of their own, as the Austrians eventually would. Instead, they became minorities in newly established nation states: the Baltic States, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Italy, Hungary and Romania. Added to this were the Germans residing in the anti-state and pariah of 1920s international politics, the Soviet Union. Since 1919, the fate of these Germans was discussed in a plethora of publications on "Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtum". Connected to this were vague or more concrete plans for an economic penetration of Central and Eastern Europe,[6] or even for the "liberation" of these Germans living abroad. In 1925, Gustav Stresemann, in a letter to the son of Wilhelm II, wrote about the "ten to twelve million members of our people ... who currently live under a foreign yoke in a foreign country"[7] Even if he guaranteed the inviolability of the borders drawn in the Locarno Treaties of 1919 in the West, he refused to promise the same for the East. There, in place of empires, nation states had emerged, which in turn faced challenges well beyond the German national minorities. It was here that the proponents of a German revision policy saw their main field of operations. "Germany remained", as Jörn Leonhard observes, "strong enough to retain hope for a revision, and yet it was humbled

[6] Comp. Gross (2015); Export Empire; Schwabe and Reichardt (1984): 215–217.

[7] Cited in Leonhard (2014): 965.

enough to turn it into a public policy as well".[8] Over a decade later, the military aspirations of the National Socialist regime were justified with reference to these Germans, who were now referred to as "Volksdeutsche". What followed was an expansion on an imperial scale, which after 1941 overshadowed even the frantic Eastern conquests of 1917/18, caused human suffering without compare, and ended in an even bigger catastrophe than 1917/18 had. With it ended any thought of a German "civilising mission" to the East, or wherever, in the future. Only with the collapse/implosion of the national socialist realm had the German Empire truly come to an end.

As has become clear from this overview, the theme of "The End of the German Empire" extends all the way to the Early Modern Era, if we understand the German Empire of 1871 to be connected to the Early Modern ideas of empire. It may have lost a substantial part of itself in 1806, but it remained present as an ideal throughout the nineteenth century, as may be seen in the Revolution of 1848 and the subsequent skirmishes between Prussia and Austria, or in the wars of the 1860s. In fact, the theme may be extended to 1945, as 1918 may have seen the abdication of an emperor, but not the abolition of the ideas for which he stood. The National Socialists deliberately courted the traditions of the empire, and through it found the support of many German contemporaries—something which becomes evident if we look at the *Historische Zeitschrift* in those years.[9] The caesura of 1918/19 should therefore not be seen as an "End of Empire", but rather as a "Regime Change". The empire did not truly end until 1945, after all. Only then did the imperial ambitions and practices of the Germans become meaningless. Due to the disastrous military, political and moral damage inflicted by the Germans on the Germans by the end of the Second World War, these traditions could not be resuscitated anymore—something which was exacerbated further due to the fact that empires had, by the 1950s, more generally lost their appeal.

2 A Surprising End to the Monarchy

1918 did not, I would argue, see the end of an empire. The system of government changed (from a monarchy into a republic), the structures of authority and participation diversified (general, fair and secret voting rights at all levels of society, for men and women; the Chancellor and the Minister being responsible to the parliament, not the monarch), new political elites emerged (the SPD, USPD and KPD) and competed with lingering old elites, and the territory decreased—but the idea(l) of empire persisted, even if it had been transformed by the Great War. Reinforced by experiences of imperial rulership, be it in colonies, in the informal Empire, or in the East of Europe, the idea was reinvigorated and reintegrated into the national and international political system in the course of the 1920s. It is vital to understand this in order to understand the rise of National Socialism.

[8] Leonhard (2014): 971–972.

[9] Ritter von Srbik (1937): 229–262; Mommsen (1943).

The German Empire did not cause the German defeat in the war. Outside of Europe, Germany had already lost everything by 1918, but these defeats were neither delegitimizing nor decisive. They changed the situation in the colonies, but not in Germany itself.[10] It is possible that the far-reaching conquests in the East in 1917/18 stood in the way of redeploying more troops from the Eastern front to the theatre of operations for the deciding battle in the West. In that sense, the temptation of expanding the Empire to the East may have hindered the reinforcement of troops in the West. Nevertheless, adding more troops would not have allowed the Empire to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat during the Spring Offensive of 1918.

The change from authoritarian monarchy to parliamentarian republic was surprising and quick in the second half of 1918. It occurred within structures that had partially been developed in the course of long historical processes, but some of which were newly formulated in the heat of the moment. The regime change could not have been predicted, but was the product of several weeks of dramatic negotiations in the wake of the military defeat of the Central Powers. These negotiations, in turn, took place in many different places at once, and involved many different actors, all of whom appraised the situation differently, had different interests, controlled different and rapidly changing power resources, and on the whole did not sufficiently coordinate their efforts. Within the framework of our *Sonderforschungsbereich* in Tübingen, we tend to call this a "re-ordering" in a dramatic threat situation.[11] Jörn Leonhard refers to it as a "phase of immensely compressed events", which, "due to the acceleration and overlapping of political, social and military developments [conforms to] a ... crisis as defined by Jacob Burckhardt".[12] No matter how the notions used to describe the situation are chosen, the key point is that short-term factors were more important than long-term developments, and that the excessive demands caused by the complicated situation, coupled with the reaction to unintended side-effects of the decision-making process played an important part in how things played out.

None of this is intended to deny that there had been "Imperial Flashpoints"[13] for decades by this point, and Germany was faced with serious constitutional, political and social problems. For instance, suffrage was not yet universal (and was a question that in Prussia had been connected to imperial policies in a disquieting manner); the increasingly influential social democratic movement had not been into the political system properly; conservative hardliners in the Eastern agricultural heartlands provoked crisis after crises because of their all too well working connections with the centres of power; there was a pressing need to reform the relations between the monarch, the government and parliament, etc.. However, firstly, these were problems facing all other European powers as well, even if they all

[10] Murphy (2018).

[11] Frie and Nieswand (2017): 5–15, 31–35; Frie and Meier (2015): 1–27.

[12] Leonhard (2014): 876.

[13] Wehler (1979).

managed, at the expense of an enormous cost in lives and resources, to survive until 1917 and, with the exception of Russia, even live through the crisis of 1918. Secondly, the Empire had proven to be enormously versatile since the 1880s: "Change . . . supplied the Wilhelmine era's strongest continuity".[14] Thirdly (and finally), even leading social democrats like Friedrich Ebert believed as late as October 1918 that the monarchical order provided enough stability to effectuate necessary reforms.

Accordingly, those in power had managed to adjourn the political debates in August 1914 under the powerful metaphor of "Burgfrieden" (literally, "peace or truce of the castle"), and to integrate the social democratic movement. However, this Burgfriede lost its integrative power as problems in the supply chain made themselves felt, and an increasing number of people became convinced that leading members of the political system were not ready to solve constitutional and political problems by advocating for equal participation of ordinary people in politics—even if they bore the brunt of the wartime effort. Social democracy, moreover, was split in 1916 over the question of vying for peace, caused by the need to continuously re-apply for wartime credits in the Reichstag. During the crisis of 1917, the party constellation that was to shape the Weimar Coalition first became visible with the introduction of the *Friedensresolution* in the Reichstag: Social Democrats, the Catholic party, and left-wing liberals. There was no power grab yet, as they did not seek to jeopardize the military effort. But the coalition stood at the ready, fully conscious of its potential power and responsibility, to present an alternative to the authoritarian military regime.

Their time would indeed come, albeit at a rather inopportune moment. Months after the failure of the offensive in the West, which had represented the last hope of the military cadre, and without any further possibilities to even think about securing a victory, Ludendorff informed the Kaiser on the 28th of September that the War had been lost. He thereupon required an offer of cease-fire to the American president Wilson, with reference to the same 14 Points the military leadership had rejected earlier, when they were still optimistic about their chances of victory on the eve of their Spring Offensive. Faced with this emergency, the 14 Points appeared an appropriate rallying point. Internally, Ludendorff hoped to increase the role of parliament within the government. It would be the party politicians who would handle the defeat, for which the military otherwise would have been held responsible. During the first days of October, Ludendorff added fuel to the fire by stating that the army could not afford to wait another 48 h. Only then, on the third of October, did the Supreme Army Command inform the Reichstag that the War was lost. That same day, a request for a truce was sent to Wilson, signed by Prince Max von Baden, who had been named the new Chancellor by the Emperor, and who could now count on the support from a majority in parliament. Bewilderment reigned among the politicians, and the people shared their confusion. Military propaganda had been almost too successful in

[14] Eley (2016): 59–82.

deluding the population that even retreats were part of an otherwise manageable position. Moreover, the German armies were spread across the map of Europe, far beyond the German borders. Why, then, concede defeat?

Politicians, who, after years of having been pushed out of the corridors of power, wanted to assume responsibility once more. An army command that faltered and wanted to relinquish responsibility. A field army that across all echelons questioned the need for further bloodshed, and which was remarkably prone to get sick or be captured. An emperor who left the centre of power by fleeing Potsdam. An American president who refused to negotiate with military leaders or authoritarian autocrats. And finally, the Allied forces, who could not agree on the next steps, but who had certainly never given the American president full power of negotiation. These were the players on the board in October of 1918. In Germany, reforms ensued, even if they did not achieve palpable results beyond the nomination (but not parliamentary election) of Max von Baden. The situation, moreover, increased pressure on the Emperor to streamline the negotiation process with the Allies by abdicating voluntarily. The Emperor, however, refused.

All this led to the Revolution. Not in Berlin or another imperial metropole, but in Kiel, where the imperial fleet was poised to sail out for one last battle against the British navy. Mutinous sailors, then soldiers and workers in Kiel set up councils. Other cities followed suit and also set up councils, so that the Revolution hopped from town to town and arrived in Berlin mere days later. The basic organisation, built around Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, demonstrated that the October reforms had not had the desired effect of being seen as a shift in power structures. The soldiers and workers simply did not trust the promises made by political leaders, they did not trust their managers and officers, and they wished for the war to end as soon as possible. The councils caused power to shift towards the organised workers' movement instead. They did not want to take over power completely, but change it in such a way as to work for the benefit of ordinary people, while also exerting control over those who were economically, military or bureaucratically powerful. That November, things seemed to work out initially. The Revolution occurred without much bloodshed. This was all the more striking given the four war-torn years that preceded it, and the massive bouts of violence that would occur in 1919, but it also showed how the existing military and political powers were completely helpless and perplexed. In the end, the fact that the Social Democrat politician Philipp Scheidemann proclaimed the Republic from the balcony of the Berlin Reichstag was more a spontaneous decision to pre-empt the proclamation of a Council Republic of Workers and Farmers by the radical left—which would eventually also happen. The revolutionary movement forced the components of social democracy, which had been alienated since 1916/17, to work together again in the "Rat der Volksbeauftragten", and postponed the moment of the Weimar Coalition to after the election of a constitutional national assembly in January 1919. Against the backdrop of the parallel developments in Russia, where the state

apparatus had imploded, the political left bridged the revolutionary moment with the aid of four basic compromises.

- Continuity of public authorities and bureaucracy in exchange for loyalty to the revolutionary regime;
- Renunciation of radical economic reforms in exchange for socio-political compromises by the employers;
- Forgoing the building of a revolutionary army in exchange for a statement of loyalty to the revolutionary government by the existing armed forces;
- Dismissal of the Council system in exchange for influence of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils on the democratisation and parliamentarization of the Empire.

Thus, the German Empire persisted—without emperor and without colonies, but with imperial goals to be pursued once the war was well and truly over. Structurally speaking, the compromises of November 1918 allowed the continuities to outweigh the changes for now. Between 1919 and 1923, several violent altercations would be fought over the future of the Republic, in the course of which counterproposals by the radical left, the conservatives and the fascists would founder. In 1923, the democratised Empire would even survive the interlocking challenges of the Occupation of the Ruhr, hyper-inflation and the so-called Beer Hall Putsch, orchestrated by Hitler, before finally getting back to safer waters. As with the late nineteenth century, the statement by James Retallack, cited earlier, also holds true for the period from 1914 to 1924: "Change … supplied the Wilhelmine era's strongest continuity".[15]

3 Conclusion

Ernst Troeltsch, theology professor in Berlin, remembered his afternoon stroll through the Grunewald on the 10th of November well: "Everything was subdued, like people whose fate was being decided somewhere far away, but nonetheless quiet and taking comfort with the fact that everything turned out so well. (…) Everywhere it was written: wages will continue to be paid."[16] A little over a month later, Troeltsch sounded less enthusiastic in a letter to the erstwhile/former Chancellor Max von Baden: "The true atrocity is the cessation of all stately continuity and the suspension of all institutions of the Empire of Bismarck. Keeping up the appearance of public order, chaos and disorder reign in the most frightful way. (…) The collapse is complete, crushed from the outside and burst from within. The worst that I feared in autumn has been surpassed to a large degree".[17] The military

[15] Eley (2016).

[16] Cited in Hirschfeld et al. (2018a, b):11–65.

[17] Hirschfeld et al. (2018a, b).

leadership received most of the blame for the burst from within, as they had acted so irresponsibly.

Troeltsch's contradictory statements demonstrate that the question of whether the German Empire collapsed or was transformed was not easy to answer for even the most well-informed middle-class contemporary observers, and, as we have seen, remains controversial to this day. Troeltsch saw continuity in the organizational and infrastructural areas, but recognized a break in communal spirit and social cohesion. In this presentation, I have argued on the side of the structural, and made a case for looking at the German Empire in its entirety, that is from 1871 to 1945. 1918 marked a regime change and territorial losses, but it was not a starting point for decline, erosion or implosion of an Empire, as the main themes of this volume suggest. To explain regime change, short-term factors outweigh long-term explanations such as the Sonderweg-thesis or a "modernity deficit". On the other hand, the different modes of shaping power and authority—from the Holy Roman Empire to the terror of the national socialist regime—show how dynamic and flexible empires can be even over a short period of time. Structural continuities can engender but also withstand strong internal changes, and might of course be changed gradually through these dynamics, but allow basic assumptions like the idea of empire to persist. So even when, after 1918, the German Empire lacked an actual emperor, it is still useful to regard it as an "empire". Contemplating how it persisted and then came to an end thus continues to raise meaningful questions about the erosion, but also the resilience, of empires.

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The End of the Habsburg Monarchy

Matthias Stickler

The doom of the Habsburg Monarchy[1] in the autumn of 1918 is a topic that—even 100 years after this epochal event—is obviously still fascinating and occupying historical research.[2]

Currently, the most recent volume XII of the series "Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918" (The Habsburg Monarchy 1848–1918) proves this.[3] It mainly includes contributions dealing with relevant historiographical, journalistic and political discourses since 1918, also and above all in the successor states of Austria-Hungary. The volume shows impressively that their legacy, be it under positive or negative connotations, is still quite alive, and makes it more than clear that the doom of this multi-ethnic empire is a difficult and multifaceted subject that eludes simple interpretations.

In order to do justice to our topic adequately, we will first examine the nature of the imperial tradition of Austria-Hungary, followed by an analysis of the domestic and foreign policy problems of the Habsburg Monarchy and of its military and political collapse at the end of the First World War.

[1] Stickler (2012): 690–719.

[2] Cf. Glaise von Horstenau (1929), Plaschka and Mack (1970), Sked (1989), Cornwall (2002), Leidinger (2017), Rumpler (2014/2016), Suppan (2014): 1057–1081, Moos (2016), Feichtinger and Uhl (2016).

[3] Rumpler and Harmat (2018).

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1 Preliminary Remark on the History of Reception

Beforehand, however, we should draw attention to two important aspects of reception history:

- Even though the Republic of Austria and, to a certain extent, the Republic of Hungary are exploiting under aspects of policy of remembrance successfully the "k.u.k." [imperial and royal] heritage, in particular the memory of Emperor Franz Joseph[4] and his wife Empress Elisabeth,[5] in the field of tourism, this does not mean, however, that both states have a relaxed relationship to their Habsburg past. Rather, this is still controversial in both states until today. In Austria,[6] this results from a, as the Austrian depth psychologist Erwin Ringel once expressed, continuing "party-historical egocentricity"[7] of the ideological-party political camps, specifically the dissent on the capacity of forming tradition on the basis of Habsburg heritage: On the one hand the conviction that the Habsburg-Catholic-Baroque tradition belongs to the dark, anti-progressive legacy of Austria, which characterises the perception of history of the Social Democratic SPÖ and the National Liberal FPÖ, and on the other hand its romantic transfiguration prone to apology, which predominates in the Christian Democratic ÖVP. In Hungary[8] appeals the idealised memory of the realm of the crown of St. Stephen decomposed in 1918/19, which is related to older national romantic narratives concerning the suppression of the revolution of 1848/49 and, thus, to the image of the extinction of Hungarian freedom by the Habsburgs. An effective sacrificial myth, which became very popular after 1848 is associated with this, expressed above all in the Hungarian national anthem, Himnusz, versified by Ferenc Kölcsey in 1823 and set to music by Ferenc Erkel in 1844. In Austria as well as in Hungary, the current lesser-Austrian and lesser-Hungarian nation-state constitutions are in some ways transversal to an offensive appropriation of the imperial legacy. If this happened or happens, then especially in selective, mostly nationalist reinterpretation, for example in the form of "völkisch"-greater German ideas or corporative state-authoritarian state conceptions in Austria in the inter-war period or in the sense of state conservative-authoritarian revisionism of Horthy-Hungary respectively the right wing-conservative authoritarianism of Viktor Orbán in the present.
- The fact that the Habsburg Monarchy perished in 1918 may lead to the anachronistic view of reducing its history to seemingly inevitable processes of decay. Indeed, the First World War had a catalysing function for the structural problems of Austria-Hungary,

[4] Cf. Bled (1988), Höbelt (2009), Redlich (1929), Schmetterer (2016), Vocelka and Vocelka (2015).

[5] Cf. Hamann (1997), Vocelka and Vocelka (2014).

[6] Cf. Hanisch (2018), Bruckmüller (1996), Fellner (1985), Burkert-Dottolo (2003), Aigner et al. (2014).

[7] Cf. Ringel (1991).

[8] Cf. Szarka (2018), Klimó (2003).

which since the last third of the nineteenth century weakened this dualistic polity composed of two multi-ethnic states, each with its own imperial tradition, which in European comparison appeared anachronistic. Nevertheless, teleological interpretations of decline fall short. Even though many people are no longer aware of this today, they are based quite considerably on basic assumptions of Austrian historiography especially of greater German or German Nationalistic orientation, such as the Viennese full professor Viktor Bibl (1870–1947), who in the early 1920s presented a two-volume, almost thousand-page account of the history of Habsburg Monarchy between 1792 and 1918 under the significant title "Der Zerfall Österreichs"[9] (Austria's Decay). On the other hand, one could point out, for example, that the countries of Central Europe ruled by the House of Habsburg (if one regards the acquisition of the Bohemian and Hungarian Crown in 1526/1527 as constitutive of a sort of empire formation) have belonged together, despite certain territorial changes, for at least 400 years. Compared to Prussia, for instance, this is a remarkably long time, especially under the conditions of multinationality and multi-denominationality. On the contrary, one could ask why the Habsburg Empire could have existed for so long anyway. In this context, the fact is not unimportant that the Habsburg Monarchy was territorially steadily increasing until 1847 (annexation of the Free City of Krakow). Although in 1860 respectively 1866 the wealthy kingdom of Lombardy-Veneto had to be ceded to Italy, and the underdeveloped Balkan province of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1878 respectively 1908) could, of course, not compensate for this loss, the territorial existence of the Habsburg Monarchy between 1815 and 1918 barely changed, in contrast, for example, to the Ottoman Empire or the Chinese Empire, at the same time. Even if one does not want to adopt the almost excessive optimism (in the last years shown especially among US historians,[10] most recently Pieter Judson[11]) regarding the comparability of the Habsburg Monarchy's state-building processes with the emerging Western and Central European nation states of the nineteenth century, it is undoubtedly true that the Habsburg Empire was significantly more sustainable in global comparison than it appears retrospectively. For example, in his well-known book "The Transformation of the World", Jürgen Osterhammel compared the Habsburg Empire with other contemporary multinational empires, such as the British Empire, the Ottoman and the Russian Empire. In doing so, he contrasted remarkably modern achievements, such as the political equality of all citizens, with actually antiquated elements, such as the inability to form a comprehensive statehood or federal structures or, closely linked to this, the asymmetrical forms of nation-building among the individual peoples.[12]

[9] Bibl (1922, 1924). The pejoratively meant statement that the "Reich" had been constituted as a great crown-entail also goes back to Bibl; cf. Bibl (1937): 33.

[10] Cf. Cohen (1998): 37–61, (2007): 241–278; Deak (2015), Stachel (2006): 97–113.

[11] Cf. Judson (2016).

[12] Cf. Osterhammel (2009).

2 The Habsburg Monarchy as an Empire

To what extent was the Habsburg Monarchy actually an empire?[13] This question is not quite easy to answer, as we are dealing here with an iridescent term. If one follows Gehler's and Rollinger's proposals for defining empires as an epoch-spanning phenomenon,[14] one finds that the Habsburg Monarchy fulfills many of the criteria mentioned there: absence of a formal act of foundation, significant territorial size, multi-ethnicity and religious pluralism, continuous support layer of ruling elites, strong political centre, will and ability to structure the external greater power structure, transcendentally justified sense of mission, will to enforce internal rule, ability to cope with military defeats and setbacks, effective culture of reception, increasing threat of desacralization, or, as one should better say in Max Weber's sense, disenchantment of their traditional or transcendently founded legitimation of rule. Only in one important point the Habsburg Monarchy does quite obviously fall out of line: Its existence was, as will be shown, certainly bound to the rule of the House of Habsburg[15] and thus to the monarchical form of government. Arno Strohmayer argued in 2014 that although the early modern Habsburg Monarchy was not a full-fledged empire, it did have imperial dimensions and its policies followed an imperial logic at times.[16] For the long nineteenth century, the imperial character of the Habsburg Monarchy became even more apparent, although or perhaps precisely because its transformation into a modern state based on the Western European model did not succeed.

The year 1804, when Emperor Franz II under the impression of Napoleon Bonaparte's growing pressure to resign the Roman-German imperial dignity, assumed the title of Emperor of Austria, however, only seems to represent something like an imperial founding act, but this did not change anything in the existing constitutional conditions in the countries governed by the House of Habsburg. Admittedly, the new imperial dignity was of course conceptually linked to Roman-German imperial traditions[17] which the Habsburgs implicitly continued. This, however, was concealed against the background of the confusing constitutional situation, which will be discussed later, by the supreme pragmatic ordinance of 11 August 1804, which stated that Emperor Franz II accepted the hereditary dignity of an Emperor of Austria (only) "as the name of our Archhouse".[18] Whether this elevation also extended to Hungary, and whether in 1804 something like an empire was constituted at all, as indicated by the state name "Kaiserthum Österreich" (Austrian Empire), which has been used in international contact since then (until 1868), was and

[13] Cf. Münkler (2005), Leonhard and Hirschhausen (2009), Gehler and Rollinger (2014a, b), Strohmeyer (2014), Suppan (2014), MacKenzie (2016), Vushko (2002), Hitchins (2002).

[14] Cf. Gehler and Rollinger (2014a, b): 22–26.

[15] Cf. Stickler (2018): 125–155; Urbanitsch (2002): 101–141.

[16] Cf. Strohmeyer (2014).

[17] Cf. Stickler (1999): 133–154.

[18] Ulbrich (1909): 31.

remained controversial until 1918.[19] More on this in the following. Nevertheless, Emperor Franz II, who as Emperor of Austria now called himself Franz I, actually intended something like a "Translatio imperii", which became clear above all by the transfer of the imperial jewels of the Holy Roman Empire to Vienna and the conversion of the so-called "crown of the house" dating from Emperor Rudolf II (reigned 1576–1612) into the Austrian imperial crown. Even in the only slightly altered imperial heraldry, the continuities catch the eye. The still Catholic character of the new empire also formed a bridge: The Roman Curia, with whose nimbus the Roman imperial dignity had been inseparably connected since the Middle Ages, tacitly transferred many privileges connected with the Roman-German imperial dignity to the emperors of Austria. This included, for example, the Exclusive, i.e. the right of the House of Habsburg to veto a candidate at the conclave; the last time this happened was in 1903, when Emperor Franz Joseph spoke out against the election of Cardinal Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro as successor to Pope Leo XIII via the Cardinal Prince-Archbishop of Krakow.[20] Nonetheless, obvious deficiencies remained in the appropriation of Roman imperial traditions: Thus, there was no substitute for the imperial coronations in Frankfurt, for example in the form of a solemn coronation as Emperor of Austria in St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, because the constitutional issues involved were too complicated and conflict-prone, especially with regard to Hungary's constitutional position.[21] Apart from the imperial crown, very few symbols of the Austrian empire existed at all. If the emperor made a representative appearance to the public, the military uniform usually substituted the non-existing specifical imperial court costume—incidentally a striking parallel to the Prussian monarchy or the Prussian-German empire. In official state portraits also dominate uniforms and dynastic garbs, such as the robes of the knightly Order of the Golden Fleece.[22] The Kingdom of Hungary,[23] on the other hand, had to some extent its own imperial tradition, in which Western-Latin and Eastern-Byzantine traditions merged what can be clearly seen in the so-called Holy Crown of St. Stephen and which was, as it were, in competition with the Austrian imperial dignity. It was also much more traditional, because it was constitutionally underpinned and, formally separated from the dynasty, existed, so to speak, in its own right. Since the Archduke Ferdinand's (later Emperor Ferdinand I) election as King of Hungary in 1526, the House of Austria had never succeeded in significantly restricting the power of the Hungarian estates. Even after the Habsburgs had succeeded in making the Crown of St. Stephen's hereditary in both male and female lines (1687 and 1722/23 respectively), Hungary was and remained rather a "corporative state supported by the

[19] Cf. Tezner (1905), Ulbrich (1909), Mischler and Ulbrich (1897).

[20] Cf. Trincia (2004), Engel-Janosi (1958/1960).

[21] Cf. Matthias Stickler (2014): 51–54; Friedjung (1919): 9–23.

[22] Cf. Pauer (1966), Unowsky (2001): 13–45, (2005).

[23] Cf. Katus (1980): 410–488; Janos (1982), Hanák (1984), Hoensch (1984), Bogyay (1990), Fischer and Gündisch (1999), Molnar (1999), Péter (2000): 239–540.

political [Magyar] nobility with intact estates-parliamentary institutions, borne by the self-administration rights of the counties (Komitate) not touched by any royal bureaucracy".[24] At every coronation as King of Hungary, which was both an religious-ecclesiastical as well as a state-constitutional act,[25] the Hungarian constitutional order, which, similar to that of the Holy Roman Empire or Great Britain to the present day, consisted of a multitude of constitutional laws, had to be confirmed by oath by the monarch; only then the royal power was legitimate.

3 The Complex Constitutional Order of the Habsburg Monarchy

From this special position of the Kingdom of Hungary resulted the peculiarity that the Habsburg Monarchy, as Wilhelm Brauneder has correctly described, developed from early modern times into a "monarchical state with differentiated federalism".[26] Since the seventeenth century, the House of Austria had only succeeded in transforming the western half of the empire into a "bureaucratically and absolutistically reshaped conglomerate of states".[27] Since then, two states had actually developed that were united in a real union under the Emperor and King in Vienna. This resulted in the frequently invoked "Problem of the Austrian State and Empire".[28] The only Basic Law of the Habsburg Monarchy binding all Crown Lands, including the Kingdom of Hungary and its adventitious countries Croatia and Slavonia, was the Pragmatic Sanction of 1713,[29] which, to put it simply, stated that these should remain united as long as Habsburgs existed in agnatic or cognatic descendance. Emperor Joseph II's attempts after 1780 to enforce absolutism as a territorial prince in Hungary failed, just as did the neo-absolutist experiment of young Emperor Franz Joseph and his councillors in the 1850s.[30] Even the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 did not fundamentally change the actual division of the monarchy into two halves, the coexistence of two competing imperial claims.[31] The Habsburg Monarchy was transformed in a dualistic manner by the latter in such a way that it was divided into two autonomous states while maintaining common matters in the areas of foreign, financial and military policy and the strong position of the common monarch. By this Emperor Franz Joseph

[24] Brandt (1985): 73.

[25] Cf. Meynert (1867).

[26] Cf. Brauneder (1980): 79, Brauneder (2006): 197–236.

[27] Brandt (1985): 73.

[28] Cf. Redlich (1920), Stickler (2011): 47–76.

[29] Cf. Turba (1911/1912, 1913).

[30] Cf.: Brandt (2014).

[31] Cf. Berger (1967), Vantuch and Holotik (1971), Stourzh (2000): 1177–1230; Brauneder (1980): 169–237; Péter (2000): 313–338.

finally recognised the sovereignty of Hungary.[32] In return, the western half of the empire had to be finally constituted as a decentralized unitary state, which was done by the so-called December Constitution of 1867.[33] The latter was an emergency solution insofar as this entity, which until 1915 was just not called Austria[34] but "The Kingdoms and Countries represented in the Imperial Council" ("Die im Reichsrat vertretenen Königreiche und Länder"), unofficially also Cisleithania, i.e. country on this side of the Leitha, lacked an independent imperial idea. Basically, as Wilhelm Brauneder pointedly noted, the entire monarchy was "stripped of its state character, Hungary and its adventitious countries [were] restored as a state, with the result that the former Austrian entire statehood confined itself to Cisleithania".[35] In the creation of the Cisleithanian state, the wishes of the Czechs for their own sub-state, based on traditional Bohemian constitutional law, were ignored, while in Galicia the Poles were able to secure extensive special rights at the expense of the Ruthenian (Ukrainian) minority there. Whether there was still a common empire above the two sub-states was a hotly debated issue since 1867 and was vehemently contested by the Hungarians in particular. In 1868, Emperor Franz Joseph established a new name of the double monarchy: "Austro-Hungarian Monarchy" or "Austro-Hungarian Empire". This name suggested an entire empire, but was rejected by the majority in Hungary; officially, there was neither a common flag nor a hymn. The black and yellow flag and the so-called "popular anthem" (Volkshymne) ("God bless, God save …" / "Gott beschütze, Gott erhalte …") were strictly speaking only symbols of the dynasty.

Demonstratively imperial official titles such as Imperial Chancellor ("Reichskanzler" as title of the joint foreign minister), Imperial Finance Minister or Imperial War Minister, which had been introduced in 1867 by Emperor Franz Joseph, fell characteristically soon into desuetude: as first disappeared the title Reichskanzler in 1871, in the case of the other two designations the prefix "Imperial" (Reich) fell away in 1903 and 1911 respectively. In this confusing situation, the dynasty played a key role as a quasi pre-constitutional or supra-constitutional reserve of legitimacy: "The Empire"—as Harm-Hinrich Brandt very aptly stated—"(the pragmatically common affairs) as a sphere of pronounced monarchical prerogatives can thus be regarded from a historical perspective as the remainder of a typical form of older power and institution formation, which was denied the further development into a state and hence essentially defied constitutionalisation and parliamentarisation. Yet it remained the basis of effective political shaping power *above* the states united by it, as long as the principle of monarchical legitimacy still possessed validity."[36] In the end, the sheer existence of the dynasty and the monarchical prerogatives

[32] Bachmann (1896), Huber (1901), Tezner (1905).

[33] Cf. Brandt (1985): 101, Rumpler (2000): 667–894.

[34] The name "Austria" for Cisleithania only became official on 3 November 1915 on the detour via a coat of arms order, but the circumscription remained in use until the fall of the monarchy; Cf. Brauneder (2006): 235.

[35] Brauneder (2006): 235.

[36] Brandt (1985): 100.

remaining with the emperor embodied something of an all-embracing Habsburg empire in terms of common affairs. This empire was therefore inconceivable without the House of Habsburg, which fully corresponded to the dynasty's self-image. In further strengthening the dynasty and the army, the only two institutions that had survived the 1848 Revolution and the Compromise almost unscathed, Emperor Franz Joseph saw the only way to counteract the centrifugal tendencies.

In fact, the two sub-states, which actually did not have a common Imperial Parliament, diverged more and more since 1867: In Hungary, where ethnic minorities accounted for a good half of the nation's population, a largely stable parliamentary regime emerged, albeit at the price that ruling liberals used a manipulative suffrage and aggressive magyarisation policies to organize majorities that were mocking a genuine principle of representation. The long-term goal was the creation of an integral Hungarian-Magyar nation state based on the French model.[37] In Cisleithania,[38] however, where no nationality was approximately close to a majority, it was possible to organise majorities in the first years by applying the indirect class system of franchise (Kurienwahlrecht) manipulatively, as in Hungary, but this entailed the targeted boycott of parliament by individual nationalities, which also increasingly degenerated the idea of representation into pure fiction. The universal suffrage finally introduced in 1907 did not pacify the situation either; on the contrary, it favoured the disintegration of the House of Representatives into ethnically homogeneous factions unwilling to compromise. The crown and government responded to the recurring crises with a tactic of targeted administrative concessions to individual nationalities as well as an extensive interpretation of emergency decree law, which ultimately resulted in an informal return to bureaucratic absolutism. Successful attempts of compromise in the crown lands, for example in Moravia (1905–1906) or Bukovina (1910), could not prevent that in Cisleithania this strategy resulted in a retarding clamping on the status quo or tinkering its symptoms, but the underlying problems remained unresolved. Not to mention the fact that the adjustment of the financial resources concerning the common affairs by committees of the parliaments of the partial states, the so-called delegations, which was necessary every 10 years, regularly made clear the fragility of the consensus of 1867. This brought Austria-Hungary the mocking name of a "monarchy on cancellation".[39] Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that, especially in Cisleithania, the constitutional system founded in 1867, which, unlike the Hungarian system, predominantly did not know any discrimination against ethnic minorities, brought about a notable fundamental politicisation of the traditional society of subjects.[40] Thus, Austria-Hungary, or more precisely its western half of the empire, was the only empire in the long nineteenth century that achieved universal male suffrage. As Pieter Judson rightly pointed out, the high turnout in the Imperial Council

[37] Cf. Péter (2000): 338–504.

[38] Cf. Rumpler (2000): 667–894.

[39] Cf. Somogyi (2000): 1107–1176.

[40] Cf. Judson (2016).

(Reichsrat) elections is quite an indication that, despite all the constitutional problems, the offer of participation established by the December Constitution allowed for a basic loyalty to the Empire to emerge.[41]

4 The Habsburg Monarchy in the System of International Relations

The growing internal problems corresponded to increasing foreign policy difficulties.[42] The multinational Habsburg Empire was particularly dependent on a functioning international system, because it was exposed to elementary threats in a Europe in which the ideal of the ethnically homogenous nation-state became more and more important. The core concerns of the Habsburg Monarchy's foreign policy were therefore, in addition to securing their respective territorial possessions, the preservation of their claim to great power status. With the dissolution of the German Confederation and the final loss of Northern Italy as a result of its defeat in the "Austro-Prussian War" (Deutscher Krieg), the Habsburg Monarchy lost its hegemonic position in Germany and Italy, which it had maintained since 1815, and thus was threatened quasi to decline in power politics. To the extent that in the 1870s the anti-Prussian revanchist-oriented forces in Vienna lost influence, also because Russia sought to expand its influence in the Balkans without regard to the interests of Austria-Hungary, the rapprochement with the German Reich, founded in 1871, gathered pace. The Dual Alliance (Zweibund)[43] of 1879 concluded between the two empires meant for Austria-Hungary an important foreign policy protection of its status as great power, although it was very clear that Berlin was the stronger partner in this alliance. Ultimately, the Dual Alliance, which increasingly also established an emotional bond between the two empires, remained the foundation of German-Austro-Hungarian relations until 1918. To the extent that Bismarck's policy of alliances aimed at integrating Russia into a tripartite constellation was replaced by a "Policy of the Free Hand" after the accession of Emperor Wilhelm II, the position of the Habsburg Monarchy in the Dual Alliance was even upgraded because it remained the only reliable partner for the increasingly isolated German Empire. Internationally, however, Austria-Hungary's position did not improve as a result of this, because Vienna, too, no longer had any alliance policy alternatives. This constellation gave rise to the reciprocal, much-cited "Nibelung loyalty" of both empires, which was also a basic axiom of Emperor Franz Joseph's foreign policy; he understood this to be the contemporary implementation of a traditional foreign policy

[41] Cf. Judson (2016): 1–15.

[42] Cf. Baumgart (1999), Bridge (1990), Brandt (1999), Canis (2016), Rauscher (2014), Rumpler (1997), Schroeder (1972), Wandruszka and Urbanitsch (1989/1993).

[43] Cf. Rumpler (1996), Angelow (2000).

based on mutual princely solidarity.[44] Emperor Franz Joseph, as Harm-Hinrich Brandt[45] rightly pointed out, had preserved the pre-constitutional and anational elements of an older conservative conception of rule more than any other European prince, and thereof derived in the end a view of the defensive and stability-preserving European function of a federation of monarchs that seemed pre-March-like. The changed power-political constellation between the Dual Alliance partners was one of the main reasons why Austria-Hungary's Balkans policy became more offensive and adventurous again, also against the background of the Russian-Serbian cooperation since 1903 that threatened its interests. The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 and the establishment of an Albanian state from the bankruptcy assets of European Turkey in 1912/13, directed against Serbia, belong to this context.

Austria-Hungary's foreign-policy action in the July crisis of 1914 after the assassination of the heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand,[46] must also be seen against this background.[47] The fact that Vienna escalated the conflicts with Serbia and thus contributed decisively to the outbreak of the World War is also due to the fact that those responsible believed they could limit the conflict regionally. At the same time, quite a few representatives of the war party, headed by Chief of General Staff Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf,[48] hoped that a happily waged war would have a "salutary" effect on the domestic political problems of the monarchy in the sense of an authoritarian remodelling of the political system. For this reason, the Imperial Council, which had been adjourned in May 1914, was no longer convened and the western half of the empire was quasi absolutistically governed on the basis of the December Constitution's emergency decree paragraph 14. Since then, the Cisleithanian political system had basically become a "barely concealed military dictatorship" by means of emergency ordinances and martial law.[49] The situation was different in the Kingdom of Hungary, where the constitutional-parliamentary system continued even under the conditions of war, and with it the rule of the Magyar elites over the other peoples. For the time after the war, there were plans within the Supreme High Command (AOK) to continue this condition, possibly even including Hungary. While the military brass were quite successful in domestic politics, the concrete warfare showed that the "k.u.k." Army did not meet the expectations placed in it. Sensitive defeats on all fronts were recorded. Austria-Hungary became increasingly dependent on the active military support of its German ally. In 1916, the German Reich finally forced the formation of a "Joint Supreme

[44] Cf. Stickler (2011): 341–343.

[45] Cf. Brandt (1990): 342.

[46] Cf. Franz (1943), Kiszling (1953), Weissensteiner (1983), Kronenbitter (1998): 169–208; Kronenbitter (2003): 267–283; Bled (2013).

[47] Clark (2012), Ferguson (1999), Höbelt (2015), Leonhard (2014), McMeekin (2014), MacMillan (2013), Rauchensteiner (2013), Rumpler (2014/2016).

[48] Cf. Dornik (2013).

[49] Rauchensteiner (2009): 64–85.

War Administration" ("Gemeinsame Oberste Kriegsleitung"), in which the Prussian-German General Staff set the tone and which ultimately led to a sensitive loss of political sovereignty for the Habsburg Monarchy as a whole.

5 Succession to the Throne, Failed New Beginning and Fall of the Habsburg Monarchy

A completely new situation occurred with the death of the 86-year-old Emperor Franz Joseph on 21 November 1916 after 68 years of rule. He was followed by his just 29-year-old, politically inexperienced grandnephew Emperor Karl I,[50] who had high-flying plans: On the one hand, he wanted to end the World War by a negotiated peace; on the other hand, he wanted to solve the nationality problems of the Habsburg Monarchy by a constitutional reform. In the medium term, Karl strove to restructure the empire in the multinational sense, which in particular would endanger the supremacy of the Magyars in their part of the empire. On the field of foreign policy, he attempted to do justice to the original Austrian raison d'état by returning to Metternich's policy of a European balance of power.[51] However, such a paradigm shift had to be accompanied inevitably by a turning away from the Dual Alliance, respectively the rejection of the German Reich's leadership claim. As a goodwill gesture, Emperor Karl convened the Imperial Council again on 30 April 1917 and attempted to make this the starting point of a domestic reconciliation policy. This went along with pardons for political prisoners and the demonstrative dismissal of Conrad as Chief of General Staff. However, it soon became apparent that clear foreign and domestic political boundaries were set to the idealist on the imperial throne.[52] This was simply due to the fact that he did not have his predecessor's reputation and authority qua office. In addition, the Hungarian constitutional law put chains on him so that he could not evade his coronation as King of Hungary in the midst of the war (30 December 1916). Since then, however, the oath of coronation de facto hogtied him with regard to far-reaching reforms in the realm of the Crown of St. Stephen. Karl's attempts at reform evaporated very quickly because the war continued unabated; he failed to cope with the food crisis and the domestic conflicts of the pre-war period broke out again undiminished. The hope to promote the ability to compromise through concessions was deceptive. On the contrary: Karl's politics only promoted the desires in the domestic political struggle and threatened to make the Reich again ungovernable. His reform plans with regard to an amendment of the Compromise treaties, which ultimately had to result in a trialistic system including the Slavs, failed because of the harsh rejection of the Magyar elites, in particular

[50] Cf. Broucek (1997), Demmerle (2016), Gottsmann (2007), Kovács (2004), Lorenz (1959), Rieder (1981), Rumpler (1990): 382–394; Stickler (2004a, b): 41–79; Unterreiner (2017).

[51] Cf. Rumpler (1990): 404.

[52] Cf. Höbelt (2016): 1017–1094; Ress (2016): 1095–1163.

the Hungarian Prime Minister István Graf Tisza. In addition, the so-called "Sixtus Affair",[53] a subjectively honest attempt by Karl, made public by the French government in April 1918, to enter into separate peace negotiations with the Western powers via his brother-in-law Prince Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma in the spring of 1917 and to work towards the cession of Alsace-Lorraine by the German Reich, shook his integrity both among his German allies and among his own population, because he publicly appeared as an attempted defector and liar. Moreover, he had to apologise shamefully at the German headquarters in Spa, Belgium, and to agree to the formation of a "Supreme War Administration" ("Oberste Kriegsleitung")—no longer a "Joint Supreme War Administration"—("Gemeinsame Oberste Kriegsleitung"). All this disappointed those who had placed hopes in the new emperor and further undermined his authority.

Karl's failure played into the hands of well-connected groups of exiles, who worked towards the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy with the help of the Western Allies. These turned to such a course since the spring of 1918, when it finally became apparent that Emperor Karl was too weak to push through initiatives to end the war with his German ally. It became increasingly clear that the Western powers were working towards the destruction of the Habsburg Monarchy. While US President Thomas Woodrow Wilson's peace programme of 8 January 1918, the so-called 14 points, still spoke of an autonomous development of the peoples of Austria-Hungary, the Czech exiles in particular had since then succeeded to create facts: On 13 June 1918, the so-called "Czechoslovak National Council", established in 1916 with the approval of the French government, was recognised under international law by France and Italy, followed by Great Britain on 13 August 1918. On 11 August 1918 the National Council was granted the right to participate in the peace conferences, and on 3 September 1918 it was also recognised by the USA as a belligerent power under the leadership of Edvard Beneš, later Foreign Minister and President of Czechoslovakia. The peace note Austria-Hungary sent to the US government on 17 September 1918 was rejected by Wilson. When the monarchy joined the ceasefire offer of the German Reich on 4 October 1918, Wilson stated on 20 October 1918, that negotiations on the basis of the 14 points were no longer possible and that the downfall of the Habsburg Monarchy was a precondition for a peace agreement. Karl's attempt to enforce a last-minute conversion of at least the western half of the empire into a multinational federal state by the Peoples' Manifesto (Völkermanifest) of 16 October 1918[54] only accelerated the collapse of the Habsburg empire because the national councils which now legally constituted themselves, aspired to complete independence. On 3 November 1918, the Habsburg Monarchy capitulated in the Villa Giusti near Padua; on 11 November 1918, Emperor Karl declared to the government of the state of German-Austria (Deutsch-Österreich),[55] founded on 30 October 1918, his renunciation of "any share in the affairs

[53] Cf. Kann (1966).

[54] Cf. Rumpler (1966).

[55] Cf. Brauneder (2000).

of state", which in substance was not an abdication, but equalled one. The next day, German-Austria declared itself a republic as part of the new German Republic. The late attempt of the Hungarian leadership to escape the pull of the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy by a unilateral declaration of independence (1 November 1918) and finally, after Karl had also renounced his share in the affairs of state to a Hungarian delegation on 13 November 1918, by the introduction of the republican form of state (16 November 1918), failed. Rather, the military defeat initiated the disintegration of the realm of the Crown of St. Stephen as well, because the oppressed minorities were now seeking to join the emerging successor states of Austria-Hungary. At the end of October, the Slovenian-Croatian National Council had already declared independence and its will to unite with Serbia. Galicia joined the newly emerging second Polish Republic; Transylvania joined the Kingdom of Romania. On 14 November 1918, a provisional National Assembly (without the participation of German or other minority representatives) in Prague confirmed the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic, which had already been proclaimed on 28 October 1918 and which subsequently occupied the former Upper Hungary. Thus, the Habsburg Monarchy had finally disintegrated.[56]

6 Conclusion

The downfall of the Habsburg Empire was a political disaster hardly really perceived in 1918/19; it ultimately resulted from an intertwining of foreign and domestic political factors: Firstly, the World War acted as a catalyst for the unresolved constitutional and nationality problems of the pre-war period; secondly, the dualistic political system established in 1867 suffered a considerable loss of confidence during the war as a result of the dictatorship of the apparently overcharged Supreme High Command in the West and the inability of the Magyar elites to compromise in Hungary, which permanently undermined the legitimacy of the institutions. Added to this was the growing material exhaustion of Austria-Hungary, which had become increasingly severe since the USA entered the war in December 1917, and the increasingly obvious political and military dependence on the German Reich. Emperor Karl was unable to change this because, as Helmut Rumpler rightly stated, he was "too weak as a politician and disadvantaged by fate".[57] The initially creeping and then increasingly increasing decline in authority of the young emperor, who did not have the emotional and traditional legitimacy of his aged predecessor and who, despite all his efforts at self-dramatisation, could not make up for this deficit by a modern form of charismatic rule, prevented the dynasty from being able to assert its key position which indeed was provided in the political system as a preconstitutional or superconstitutional reserve of legitimacy in the sense of preserving

[56] Cf. Suppan (2016): 1257–1341.

[57] Rumpler (1990): 404.

the empire. In this respect, the agony and downfall of Austria-Hungary since the beginning of 1918 showed once again impressively shown how much the imperial nimbus of the Habsburg Monarchy was interwoven with the House of Habsburg and the ruling emperor and king. The latter was finally disenchanted. The loyalty of the majority of the emperor's and king's subjects, also including civil servants and ordinary soldiers, shifted to the emerging National Councils and thus to the new nation states that emerged from the bankruptcy assets of the Habsburg Empire. The traditional support layers of the monarchical system, in particular the high nobility loyal to the Habsburgs and the officer corps, had nothing to oppose this. Therefore, all attempts at restoration by Emperor Karl[58] and his son and heir, Archduke Otto,[59] failed. It was not until his declaration of renunciation in 1961 that Otto von Habsburg, against manifold resistance within the dynasty and its legitimist supporters, ended all hopes for a restoration of Habsburg rule, in whatever form. In a figurative sense, one could certainly argue that only with this overdue but nevertheless painful step, which identifies the last crown prince of Austria-Hungary in the light of the heritage of his ancestors as a truly important representative of his dynasty, the Habsburg Empire did really perish.

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[58] Cf. Stickler (2004a).

[59] Cf. Matthias Stickler (2004b).

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The Long Lasting End of the Ottoman Empire

Lutz Berger

The Ottoman Empire was in decline already in the midst of the sixteenth century. At least this was the opinion of Ottoman officials who felt that things were going wrong. Research in the last decades has shown that this perception had much to do with the vested interests of certain groups within the bureaucracy who saw their positions threatened by newcomers. The demand to return to the good old days was not only caused by selfless anguish about the fate of the Sublime State.[1] While sixteenth-century authors felt that something went wrong, the crisis of the mid-seventeenth century, when at times the Venetians came close to threatening Istanbul itself, and later on the heavy defeats against the Habsburg Empire and Russia led to dark forebodings about the future and made intellectuals for the first time think of the possible end of the Empire. Mustafa Naima wrote his history of the seventeenth-century Ottoman Empire with Ibn Khaldun's famous *Introduction to History* in mind. Sooner or later, he thought, all empires end. And even the Ottoman Empire is now about to enter its old age before the inevitable fall. Ruthless reaffirmation of political

This short paper does not aim at providing the reader with a general picture of late Ottoman history. Short overviews that also contain all the factual information used for the present paper can be found e.g. in Quataert (2000), Hanioğlu (2017), or Howard (2017).

[1] A typical example of this milieu and its ideas is analysed by Fleischer (1986).

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authority may work as an anti-aging medicine nonetheless and keep the inevitable end still some time in the distance.[2]

While all these fears had a certain unrealistic ring about them if we take into consideration that the Empire was until the end of the eighteenth century always capable of meeting its external enemies on nearly equal footing. After the French occupation of Egypt, it became clear that real danger was ahead. In order to save the Empire from extinction in form of a takeover by the great powers or, even worse, by its ancient subjects on the Balkans, superficial reforms were not enough. European ways had to be accepted in a wide range of fields. The former, occupation by Europeans, did not come to pass only because, different from the case of the North African provinces of the Empire, the powers could not agree on how to partition the spoils, i.e. the European and Asian parts of the Well Protected Domains of the Ottoman Sultan. The latter, takeover by new Balkan states, in fact did arrive in the European part of the Empire during and after the catastrophic Balkan wars in the years immediately before World War I when the Ottomans nearly lost all their European territories in a welter of violent ethnic cleansing on all sides of the conflict.

Thus, all measures taken to bring the Ottoman Empire to European standard with respect to the economy, infrastructure, the army, the administration and the like turned out to be just too slow to close the ever-widening gap with the European center of the nineteenth century's world system. Without the power to impose its will by sheer force, the Ottoman state disappeared as social elites everywhere turned away from identification with the Empire to the idea of the nation state. This ideological change within the elites arrived at different dates. In the early part of the nineteenth century among some parts of the Greek population, later in that century in other parts of the Balkans, not before the World War I among most of the Arabs of Greater Syria, only after the War among Turks and Kurds. At this point, the breakup of the Empire was not only an affair of great power politics anymore. In the end it had become the agenda of different groups within (post-)Ottoman political and social elites themselves.

This paper will in all brevity discuss the interplay of central and provincial elites in order to place the process of Ottoman imperial dissolution within a wider framework of history of empires.

For this purpose, it may be good to start with a look on what constitutes an empire and what concepts do not necessarily enter into a definition of the concept.

Economic power and exploitation *stricto sensu* are often mirroring political power relationships that are formative for empire, but this is not a defining feature of empire. Economic exploitation of a periphery by a center is possible without there being a relation of political dominance. On the other hand, imperial dominance that exists does not always create a corresponding economic relation of imperial center and economically exploited periphery. An example of the first case (economic domination where the center produces industrial goods at a high price for a captive peripheral market producing raw materials)

[2] On him Thomas (1972).

would be the relationship of Catalonia and the rest of Spain during the nineteenth century. High tariffs prevented people from other parts of Spain (not least in Castile) to profit from lower world market prices for industrial goods and forced them to buy whatever was produced in the factories of Catalonia. An example for the second case (political domination without economic control) would be Japan and West Germany after the World War II and especially after the end of the Bretton Woods system that in the post-war years had symbolized American economic dominance by tying all currencies to the Dollar. Both Japan and West Germany thrived as parts of the American Empire. The Americans at the imperial center payed for their allies' security and at the same time kept their own market widely open to the manufacturers of their erstwhile enemies. In the process, the two grew ever richer while the economy of the US declined relatively. Empire therefore is not necessarily something organized so as to further the economic position of the (political) center at the cost of the (political) periphery.

An empire, therefore, rather than an instrument of economic domination (it may be this as well, but this is not its defining feature), is a way of creating political order. For the purposes of this paper empire is differentiated from other types of polity (say a nation state, a non-imperial realm) by its size and the acceptance of a certain amount of diversity among its components. What is more, these components have to be in a hierarchical relation with the center. Most importantly for the purposes of the present paper, this hierarchical relation finds expression in the fact that political dominance over the imperial whole is monopolized by an elite recruited from the imperial center only. Normally the component parts do not have relations among each other that might endanger the dominance of the latter. Empires in the strict sense according to this definition are e.g. the European colonial empires of the 19th and 20th centuries (or the Roman Empire of republican times). The classical nineteenth-century colonial empires had elites that were provided by the center. Members of peripheral elites played important roles in their respective regions (say as maharajahs of Indian principalities or kings and sultans in Africa in the British case) but had no chance ever to play any role at the center or in other parts of the periphery. The imperial elite remained British for all practical purposes.

There is a second type of polity that is usually called an empire i.e. polities of a certain size that like an empire are marked by diversity but that are *not* marked by the fact that power is monopolized by an elite recruited at the center. For purposes of the present paper such polities are seen not as empires in a narrow sense as defined above but rather as federal entities or sometimes nation states in the making. In federal polities provincial elites not only rule autonomously in their respective region (this may also hold true in the colonial type of empire) but may at the same time be part of the central "Reichselite" without losing their particular identity (e.g. the lands of the Spanish crown under the Habsburgs). Others are rather nation states[3] in the making, the differences between members of the elites of

[3] Speaking about nationhood in late antiquity is problematic. What is implied here by "nation state" is that the political borders coincide with the region where a certain people lives and not e.g. with the

different origin are more and more reduced and members of the elite, no matter what their origin may be, see themselves increasingly (and are seen by others) as part of one group, as e.g. "Romans" in the Roman Empire after the second or third century.[4] A classic nineteenth-century example of this type of polity is the Austrian Dual Monarchy where (at least in Cisleithania) all members of local elites, no matter from which part of the periphery they stemmed, could and did become part of an integrated imperial elite. Of course, most real polities were not pure exemplars of these ideal types. What is more, empires could over time change the ways their elites were recruited. The Roman Empire is a classic case of an empire that started with a rather narrow base along "British" lines and with time achieved to integrate all peripheral elites into the power-wielding imperial elite. As the present author has tried to show elsewhere, the fact that at the end of Antiquity this process was reversed and that provincial elites were increasingly marginalized again played an important role in the final downfall of the Empire in the east during the Arabo-Muslim conquest.[5]

What I would like to do in the next section is to ask if the Ottoman state was an empire of the British type as defined above or rather one of the Austrian and how the Empire changed in this respect during the last period of its existence.

The early Ottoman state in the period of conquest until the fifteenth century was a rather open entity. Of course, the state was ideologically Muslim (this holds true at least since the middle of the fourteenth century).[6] However, this did not mean that its elite was closed to newcomers from the lately conquered periphery. Quite to the contrary, a considerable number of early Ottoman leaders were of Greek origin. In the Balkans local nobles were allowed to retain their rank and to become part of the new military establishment. The early Ottoman state, in this respect, followed the Austrian model of imperial rule rather than the British. But then, we might ask if the medium-sized Ottoman state could legitimately be

territory ruled by a certain ruler or other forms of definition of a political entity. Nation state in this sense does not imply that the whole population is identified with the "nation" or should have political rights and obligations. This does not even hold true for e.g. the US before the Civil War (in the south until the 1960s).

[4]This process of integration of peripheral elites was already under way since at least the Social War in the first century BC or even earlier. But until the end of the first century this integration did not go without resistance of established members of the aristocracy, as when Claudius tried to introduce aristocrats from Gaul into the Senate. This resistance may be seen as a typical case of defense of the privileges of the established against outsiders as analyzed by Elias and Scotson (1965). The European colonial empires of the 19th and 20th centuries started in their turn to admit some of the colonized to their centers of power, both in the British and even more in the French case (cabinet members and high administrators like Blaise Diange, Félix Eboué and later Leopold Senghor being only three very well-known examples). But this process of integration of peripheral elites had not really come under way when the colonial empires dissolved.

[5]This is a central thesis of Berger (2016).

[6]There has been some debate on the role of Islam and jihad in the early Ottoman state. A balanced overview is to be found in Kafadar (1995).

termed an empire at the time. That changed during the fifteenth century when the Ottomans had become without doubt the most powerful political entity in the region. Both the Turkish and the traditional Balkan elites were soon to be discarded as the rulers of the Empire followed a path already trodden by so many Muslim rulers since the ninth century.[7] In order to free themselves from an elite with a power base and legitimacy that might endanger their rule, Ottoman Sultans limited the influence of the military groups that had brought them to power. Instead, they based their rule on an infantry (the Janissaries) and an administration staffed by slave recruits from the Balkans. Only the provincial cavalry, that did not play an important role politically, was still formed by a hereditary, mostly Turkish-speaking, aristocracy.[8] As happened in other Muslim polities before, these slave groups after some time started to free themselves of the absolute domination by the Sultan and became a vested-interest-group in their own right. In the seventeenth century members of the central infantry and bureaucrats were not recruited as slaves anymore, but they still used to come from the Balkans and (to a smaller degree) from Anatolia. The military and administrative personnel of the state but also the religious establishment that played a large role in the administration of the Ottoman lands were of the same geographical origin. The leading Muslim religious functionaries in the state all came from the central regions of the empire. Arabs nearly never played a big role within the religious bureaucracy of judges and muftis.[9] The Orthodox Christians of the Empire were under the control of the Greek Orthodox elites of Constantinople. On the Balkans sometimes the local Orthodox were allowed autocephaly when Balkan slave-viziers in the administration wanted to privilege the communities of their origin like Sokullu Mehmet Pasha in the late sixteenth century. Thus, during the central period of the Ottoman Empire all positions of power within the state were in the hands of people from the capital and adjacent provinces, mostly the Balkans. By contrast, Arabs, no matter how high their standing within their own communities may have been, never played a significant part in the administration of the realm as a whole. According to the definition above, the classical Ottoman Empire from 1400 to 1800 was an empire in very much the same way as the British Empire of the nineteenth century, controlled by an elite whose membership was limited to people from the central regions of the polity. It was during this same nineteenth century, when the British expanded their Empire over the globe, that the Ottoman state moved away from being an empire of the British type into the "Austrian" direction.

The relative weakness of the Ottomans as against the Europeans during the nineteenth century and the necessity of reform if the state was to survive brought about some change.

[7] In other Muslim empires, the administration normally was not in the hand of slaves. The important role held by Christians (who could not aspire to wield political power of their own in the Mamluk state) was in a way functionally similar to slave recruitment of bureaucrats in the Ottoman Empire. On older polities see Berger (2020).

[8] Their fiefs by contrast were not hereditary.

[9] When they did so as in the seventeenth-century Kadizadeli movement, they were in opposition to the entrenched positions of the traditional families of religious dignitaries.

The leading role of the Greek Orthodox Church was under suspicion because of the rise of nationalist movements among the Greeks who simply could not be trusted the same way as before. Another pillar of the old system, the Janissary infantry, had lost its military usefulness and was violently disbanded in 1826. The central army, formerly open only to people from the Balkans and Anatolia was then transformed by the introduction of general conscription even in the Arab provinces (in reality only for Muslims). Schools to train future bureaucrats were created in all the Ottoman lands. The children of tribal chiefs from the periphery were brought to Istanbul to be educated as future members of the central elite (or loyal servants of the Sublime Porte within the provinces). In the short-lived parliament of 1876 and its successors after 1908 provincial notables were represented on an equal footing with the elite from the old center of the Empire. With the catastrophic wars immediately before 1914, the Balkans, the old breeding ground of Ottoman elites, was finally lost by the Ottomans. Of course, many leading statesmen of the time still stemmed from the regions now under foreign control, but a massive change in the structure of Empire in the Austrian direction was under way.

That this did not come about, but that instead the Ottoman state dissolved was mainly the result of great power politics during and after the World War I. But it was also the result of a change in the ideological climate. For political elites all over the world the nation state had now become the model of the future. This had already led to the formation of the new Balkan states; in the early twentieth century it turned to be a corrosive factor in the remainder of the Empire. There were efforts to lend ideological underpinning to the transformation of the Ottoman state into a federal structure along Austrian lines by creating a common imperial identity. In the end, this Ottomanism, apart from some short moments when it seemed to have a mass following (as in the immediate aftermath of the Young Turk revolution 1908), was fighting a losing battle against ethnic nationalism. It is true, older and higher placed provincials remained faithful to the Ottoman state right to its very end and were often nostalgic after its demise. But both in the central lands of the Empire and in the Arab periphery nationalism was gaining ground among the younger generation of well-educated people that as yet had not acquired a place in society according to their expectations. These people greeted the dissolution of the Empire with relief and hoped for a future for themselves in the new states that slowly grew out of the debris left behind by the Ottoman defeat in war and the consequent takeover by imperialists of the British (and French) kind after 1918.

In the 19th and early twentieth century, the lack of resources (economic, political, cultural) in the hands of Ottoman central elites had forced them to turn away from the old British pattern of empire and instead try the Austrian one. This had happened just at a moment in time when transnational federal empires of this kind were seen as a model of the past and British imperialism (in the concrete sense and as a type of empire) seemed to triumph. As it turned out, the end of the Ottomans and their substitution by the Turkish Republic of Mustafa Kemal was signaling (not causing) the beginning of the end of the British and French types of colonial empires as well. Both did not have the power anymore to impose their will on the Turkish nation state that was now being created. After a World

War I waged to "make the world safe for democracy", as Woodrow Wilson said, the fact that many people did not have a say in the political affairs of their own country (something only a minority of people would have bothered about in the mid nineteenth century anywhere in the world) had become less acceptable than before. The rule over people by foreign elites in the British imperial style was one variant of this. Sovereignty had to be in the hands of the nation and its representatives as Mustafa Kemal had declared before the Turkish national assembly.[10]

Thus, at the end of the World War I the writing was on the wall. The future seemed to belong neither to classical empires with central elites nor to the Austrian variant but to the nation state. However, since polities are always of very different size and power, things turned out differently in the end: Thanks to another *translatio imperii*, empire of the British type revived after another World War. However, it did so in a shameful informal guise. Under the umbrella of American, Soviet (and, in the early twenty-first century, probably Chinese) empires, all kinds of local democracy (western liberal and illiberal or communist variants) have allowed the central elites of these new informal empires some anti-imperial face-saving.

In form of the EU the Austrian-style imperial type that had been discarded in the nineteenth century has made a reappearance on the scene.[11] If this kind of imperial political entity succeeds better in our century than in the 19th and may in the long run function as an alternative to nation state and empire British-style in ordering the world is now more uncertain than some years ago.

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[10] That he had a very peculiar understanding of what that meant in the Turkish case is another matter.

[11] Some people would say that the EU was rather a German informal empire of course, and this impression on the part of many outside Germany is an important element of the present crisis of the institution.

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Part VII

The End of World War II and the Cold War

Das Ende des faschistischen Imperiums

Carlo Moos

Das Ende des italienischen Faschismus ist ein komplexer Vorgang, der sich auf verschiedenen (italienischen und ausseritalienischen) Ebenen abspielte und die Folge mehrfach verschränkter Entwicklungen war. Zu ihnen gehört, dass das Ende des Faschismus und das Ende seines Imperiums zusammenfielen, weil es einem zentralen Programmpunkt von Mussolinis kulturrevolutionärer „Mission" entsprach und in eins damit seinem Raumprogramm im Mittelmeer,[1] zu dem als europäische Ergänzung auch der Balkan gehörte. Dieses Programm ist durchaus mit Hitlers Lebensraum-Visionen im Osten vergleichbar, obwohl es aufgrund einer beschränkteren Ausgangsbasis noch überrissener erscheint, ähnlich wie seine rassenpolitische Komponente, wonach die „razza italica" ausersehen sein sollte, den faschistischen Lebensraum als Herrenrasse so zu dominieren wie die nordische Herrenrasse den ihren.[2] Insofern gehört Mussolinis Gesamtprogramm als Sekundäreffekt in den Kontext des von Hitlerdeutschland ausgehenden rabiaten Bemühens um eine Neuordnung Europas, deren Möglichkeiten bis zur Wende von Stalingrad nahezu grenzenlos erschienen. Es ist klar, dass Italien trotz allem falschen Schein und einem forcierten Selbstbewusstsein dabei nur eine Nebenrolle spielen konnte.

[1] Cf. De Felice 1981: 321–325.

[2] Cf. Rodogno 2006: 67–71; Moos 2004: 153–201.

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1 Vorgeschichte

Vor Mussolinis auf das revisionistisch agierende Hitlerreich [3] abgestütztem Grossprojekt betrieb Italien mit einer als *Late-comer* späten Einfügung in den imperialistischen Wettbewerb und nach verschiedenen Niederlagen (vor allem Adua 1896 mit dem nachfolgenden Sturz von Ministerpräsident Francesco Crispi) eine vergleichsweise halbwegs ‚normale' Kolonialpolitik, allerdings mit gemessen an den Ansprüchen bescheidenen Erfolgen und schwieriger Durchsetzung seines Herrschaftsanspruchs.[4] In einer längeren *ersten Phase* wurden in den 1880er-Jahren am Horn von Afrika Eritrea und Somalia okkupiert und nach dem italienisch-türkischen Krieg 1911/1912, mit dem Italien einen bis 1922/1923 dauernden überlangen Teil-Weltkrieg auslöste, Tripolitanien und die Cyrenaika gegen heftigen Widerstand besetzt,[5] den zu brechen letztlich erst in der sogenannten "Pazifizierung" 1931 und mit der Zusammenfassung zu Libyen 1934 gelang. Im gleichen Kontext gegen das Osmanenreich wurden 1912 die 14 Dodekanes-Inseln mit Rhodos eingenommen; all dies mit – wegen der losgetretenen nationalistischen Aufwallungen – weitreichenden innenpolitischen Folgen bis hin zur Machtergreifung Mussolinis 1922.

Eine kürzere *zweite Phase* war jene von Mussolinis Raumpolitik,[6] geprägt vom Willen, ein ‚richtiges' Mittelmeer-Imperium zu schaffen, ideologisch verbrämt mit Vorstellungen von Italien als der „dominatrice del Mediterraneo",[7] die sich am antiken Rom orientieren sollte, am „mare nostrum" und an der „pax romana" sowie am faschistischen Rom als drittem Rom und Mussolini als neuem Cäsar und Augustus.[8]

Mit der Eroberung Abessiniens (Äthiopiens) und der Zusammenfassung der Ostafrikanischen Kolonien in der *Africa Orientale Italiana* (AOI) war 1936 ein Kolonialreich entstanden, das für kurze Zeit (bis 1941) nach dem britischen und dem französischen das grösste in Afrika war. Andererseits setzte hier das verhängnisvolle

[3] Cf. Cattaruzza et al. 2013: 5–12.

[4] Cf. Moos 2014: 1135–1139.

[5] Diesen Widerstand dokumentiert ein unlängst vom Historiker Pierre Schill (Montpellier) entdeckter Bericht des französischen Journalisten Gaston Chérau für den „Matin" vom 26. Dezember 1911, der Photos von der Hinrichtung libyscher Aufständischer in Tripolis publizierte. Chérau kommentierte in einem Brief an die Familie (deutlicher als in seinen Artikeln): „Je me révolte contre ces inutiles tueries que l'envahisseur paiera tôt ou tard et bien qu'on pense le contraire." Vgl. Frédéric Bobin, Les fantômes de la guerre coloniale en Libye, Le Monde, 3. Januar 2019. Bobin verweist auf das eben erschienene Buch von Pierre Schill zum libyschen Parcours von Gaston Chérau: Réveiller l'archive d'une guerre coloniale, Creaphis éditions, 2018.

[6] Moos 2014: 1139–1142.

[7] Vgl. den Text von 1929, der als eine Art von 'Katechismus' des Faschismus anzusehen ist: „Quale è dunque la sua [di Mussolini] grande mèta? / Fare che il XX Secolo veda Roma, centro della civiltà latina, dominatrice del Mediterraneo, faro di luce per tutte le genti." La Dottrina Fascista. Ad uso delle scuole e del popolo, Roma 1929, 74.

[8] Cf. Susmel 1958b: 185–193; Hasler 1980: 420–506.

Abdriften in deutsches Fahrwasser ein,[9] als sich die Handelsbeziehungen zum Deutschen Reich – im Gegenzug zu den halbherzigen Völkerbundsanktionen gegen Italien – stark ausweiteten [10] und jetzt (ex post gesehen) Anfang und Ende des Reichs zusammenzufallen begannen. Während die Unterwerfung Abessiniens selbst mit genozidaler Gewalt [11] nicht wirklich gelang, war nach El Alamein 1941/1942 alles wieder vorbei.

Im Adriaraum war ein Jahrzehnt vorher (1927/1928) ein Protektorat über Albanien errichtet worden, das am 6./7. April 1939 als Echo zu Hitlers Einmarsch in Prag militärisch besetzt wurde und bis 1943 in Personalunion mit Italien vereinigt blieb. So konnte sich Vittorio Emanuele III neben König von Italien und Kaiser von Abessinien jetzt auch noch König von Albanien nennen.

Während dieses Imperium, in dem zu Beginn des Zweiten Weltkriegs insgesamt etwas über 300.000 Italiener siedelten (davon in Eritrea vielleicht 75.000 und in Libyen rund 110.000),[12] in diesem Krieg nahezu sofort verloren ging, kam es zeitgleich in einer Art Quantensprung zur letzten *Kürzestphase* von Italiens Imperialpolitik, als das Land ab 1940/1941 im deutschen Schlepptau als Besatzer fungieren konnte: 1940 sehr bescheiden jenseits der französischen Grenze in Menton (Mentone) und einigen Dörfern in den französischen Alpen, mit einer Ausweitung im November 1942 anlässlich der Besetzung von Vichy-Frankreich durch die Wehrmacht um acht Departemente bis Nizza und zur Rhône, ohne Marseille und Toulon, aber dafür mit Korsika. Demgegenüber trat Italien in Jugoslawien und Griechenland als Besatzer sofort massiv in Erscheinung. Neben der Annexion von Teilen Sloweniens und Dalmatiens und der Angliederung Kosovos an Albanien wurde in den italienischen Gebieten allenthalben Italianisierung und Faschisierung versucht und Ausbeutung und brutale Repression betrieben.[13] Als Besatzer agierten die Italiener auf dem Balkan brutal wie der deutsche Partner und vergleichbar wie sie sich in ihren Kolonien mit Masseninternierungen, ethnischen Säuberungen, Geiselnahmen und Erschiessungen verhielten.[14]

[9] Cf. Petersen 1973.

[10] Cf. Woller 2010: 164.

[11] Cf. Mattioli 2005a.

[12] Demgegenüber lebte damals allein in New York eine halbe Million Italiener; Cf. Segrè 1979: 12–13; Laut Delhaes-Guenther gab es im gleichen Zeitraum (zu Beginn des 2. Weltkriegs) in allen afrikanischen Kolonien zusammen keine halbe Million Italiener, Delhaes-Guenther 1979: 392–420.

[13] Cf. Guerrazzi 2013; Ruzicic-Kessler 2017.

[14] Cf. Rodogno 2006: 334–416; Moos 2014: 1148.

2 Der Konnex zwischen dem Zusammenbruch des Faschismus und dem Ende des italienischen Kolonialreichs

Auf Mussolinis frühe Machtergreifung 1921/1922, auf seinen bis 1929 verzögerten Diktaturaufbau und auf die – nur scheinbar – fulminanten Erfolge der mittleren 1930er Jahre folgte ab 1938 und verstärkt ab 1940 eine längere Agonie-Phase und im Sommer 1943 der plötzliche Sturz durch die eigenen Leute sowie eine blutige Kriegs- und Bürgerkriegs-Coda bis Ende April 1945.

Wegen Italiens sukzessiver Annäherung an das Deutsche Reich von der Proklamation der „Achse" auf dem Mailänder Domplatz am 1. November 1936 bis zum „Stahlpakt" vom 22. Mai 1939, nicht zuletzt aber auch im Zuge der Rassedekrete vom November 1938 schwand der im Jubel bei der Ausrufung des *Impero* im Mai 1936 gipfelnde Konsens rasch und brach nach dem Kriegseintritt am 10. Juni 1940 endgültig ein. Jetzt setzte das über die nächsten Jahre sich erstreckende lange Ende das Faschismus ein.

Vor dem Eintritt in den Krieg übersteigerten sich Mussolinis Phantasien enorm, nachdem er schon früher – erstmals 1930 – vom „popolo italiano" als „prigioniero nel mare che fu di Roma" gesprochen [15] und anfangs Februar 1939 dem Grossen Faschistenrat in einer nächtlichen Geheimrede angekündigt hatte, dass der Mittelmeer-Kerker gesprengt und zu den Ozeanen, dem indischen oder dem atlantischen, vorgerückt werden müsse.[16] Der von ihm neben Hitlers ost-, nord- und westeuropäischen Kriegen auf dem Balkan, im Mittelmeer und in Ostafrika intendierte Parallelkrieg nährte sich von phantastischen Träumen betreffend den gesamten Adriaraum sowie Nizza, Korsika, Tunesien und Dschibuti (von Frankreich) und Malta, Britisch-Somalia, Ägypten, dem Sudan, Jemen, Aden und Oman (von Grossbritannien), scheiterte aber bevor er ‚richtig' beginnen konnte schon im Winter 1940/1941 auf dem Balkan und wenig später in Afrika.

Der Vormarsch gegen die von der Wehrmacht schon geschlagenen Franzosen konnte im Juni 1940 sofort gestoppt werden, ebenso rasch die gegen Griechenland ab Ende Oktober 1940 aus Albanien versuchte Invasion. Mit der nachfolgenden Hilfestellung der Wehrmacht setzte im Frühjahr 1941 die militärische Satellisierung Italiens ein, die sich in Nordafrika fortsetzte und nach der Landung der Alliierten auf Sizilien und ihrer Übersetzung aufs Festland mit dem blitzartigen Einmarsch der Wehrmacht in Mittel- und Norditalien im September 1943 als Antwort auf den unter Mussolinis Nachfolger Badoglio geschlossenen Waffenstillstand aufs brutalste vervollständigte.[17]

Während die von den Alliierten im Süden kontrollierte königliche Badoglio-Regierung in Bari selbst von ihren gemässigten Gegnern als neofaschistisch qualifiziert wurde, so als Benedetto Croce und Carlo Sforza sie am 31. Januar 1944 in einem Protest-Telegramm an die Außenminister Anthony Eden, Cordell Hull und Molotow als „the neo-fascist regime of

[15] Susmel 1958a: 235.

[16] Moos 2014: 1144.

[17] Cf. Serra 1993: 74–76.

Victor Emmanuel and Badoglio“ bezeichneten,[18] versuchte Mussolinis Schattenregime der Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI) in der Salò-Spätphase zwar noch eine eigenständige Politik etwa im immer brutaler geführten Bürgerkrieg [19] gegen die *Resistenza*, den die deutschen Besatzer im wesentlichen den Italienern überliessen, geriet ansonsten aber nahezu vollständig ins Schlepptau der Deutschen;[20] dies nicht zuletzt in der Rassenpolitik, weshalb über 8000 Jüdinnen und Juden aus Italien der „Endlösung“ zum Opfer fielen.[21] Im Vorgriff auf ein siegreiches Hitler-Europa verlor Italien de facto auch die sogenannten Operationszonen Alpenvorland (Südtirol sowie den Trentino und Belluno) und Adriatisches Küstenland (Udine und die Venezia Giulia mit Triest und Istrien),[22] womit Hitlers am Tag vor dem Einmarsch in seine „Heimat“ (11. März 1938) abgegebenes Versprechen der Respektierung der Brennergrenze zu guter Letzt doch noch gebrochen wurde.[23]

Parallel zum für Italien sofort desaströsen europäischen Krieg wurde schon vor der Endphase nach Mussolinis Sturz und dem darauffolgenden königlichen Frontwechsel das afrikanische Imperium beim Vormarsch der Alliierten sukzessive zerschlagen. Die AOI (Eritrea, Somalia, Abessinien) ging 1941, Libyen 1942/1943 verloren. Der Negus Haile Selassie war am 5. Mai 1941 wieder in Addis Abeba, wo er fünf Jahre vorher vertrieben worden war. Insofern hatte (wie Jens Petersen anmerkte) „dieser letzte grosse Kolonialkrieg der europäischen Geschichte“ nahtlos in den „ersten Befreiungskrieg der Dritten Welt“ übergeleitet.[24] Die AOI dauerte gerade ein halbes Jahrzehnt, während Eritrea und Somalia gut ein halbes Jahrhundert und Libyen etwas mehr als ein Vierteljahrhundert italienisch gewesen waren.

Im September 1943 rückte die Wehrmacht in die italienischen Besatzungsgebiete in Frankreich und auf dem Balkan ein, womit als letzter Rest von Mussolinis Imperium auch das rudimentäre Besatzungs-Imperium von deutschen Gnaden verloren war; es hatte lediglich vom Frühjahr 1941 bis zum Sommer 1943 gedauert.

Mussolini selber endete Ende April 1945 auf der Flucht in die Schweiz durch eine improvisierte Hinrichtung seitens der *Resistenza* am Comersee, ein für das völlige Scheitern aller seiner nicht nur imperialen Träume geradezu emblematisches Ende.

Völkerrechtlich hörte sein Imperium in den Pariser Friedensverträgen vom 10. Februar 1947 mit Hitlers einstigen Verbündeten Italien, Rumänien, Ungarn, Bulgarien und Finnland zu existieren auf. Die Präambel zum italienischen Vertrag [25] statuierte zum

[18] Zeno 1975: 417–418.

[19] Pavone 1991.

[20] Cf. Klinkhammer 1993.

[21] Cf. Moos 2004.

[22] Cf. Wedekind 2003.

[23] Cf. De Felice 1981: 470–471.

[24] Petersen 1983: 82.

[25] Text des Friedensvertrags mit Italien, unterzeichnet in Paris am 10. Februar 1947.

einen, dass Italien zwar „seinen Teil an der Verantwortung für den Krieg trägt“, zum andern aber, dass es nach dem Waffenstillstand vom September 1943 „am 13. Oktober 1943 Deutschland den Krieg erklärte und dadurch zum Mit-Kriegführenden (cobelligerante) wurde“. Auf letzterer Feststellung insistierte Ministerpräsident Alcide De Gasperi bereits in seiner Rede an der Pariser Friedenskonferenz vom 10. August 1946 nachdrücklich, als er den „carattere punitivo“ des Vertrags anprangerte, der sich in 78 Artikeln auf die „guerra fascista“ und in keinem einzigen auf die „cobelligeranza“ beziehe [26] . . . wie wenn ein gänzlich anderes Land jene „guerra fascista“ geführt hätte, die in der Salò-Phase parallel zur „cobelligeranza“ noch fortgesetzt wurde, nicht zu reden von Italiens Vorreiterrolle als Gründerland des Faschismus, als dem ihm in einem generischen Faschismuskonzept die Rolle des Ur- oder Modellfaschismus zufällt, mit allen geschichtstheoretischen Weiterungen, die sich damit verknüpfen lassen.

Doch schon in der Schlussakte der Potsdamer Konferenz von Juli/August 1945 war Italien gegenüber den anderen Ex-Verbündeten des Dritten Reichs positiver beurteilt worden [27] und verdankte gerade dem Umstand seiner gleichsam in letzter Minute erfolgten ‚richtigen‘ Positionierung vom militärischen Satelliten zum „cobelligerante“, dass ihm eine Besetzung wie Österreich oder eine Teilung wie Deutschland erspart blieb. Nicht zuletzt verdankte es ihm neben dem anbrechenden Kalten Krieg auch, dass es Südtirol nicht an Österreich restituieren musste.

Durchaus anders als in den von De Gasperi gegenüber dem amerikanischen Staatssekretär James F. Byrnes im Vorfeld der Londoner Aussenministerkonferenz vom September 1945 ausgedrückten Erwartungen [28] musste Italien im Friedensvertrag gemäss Artikel 14 die Inseln des Dodekanes an Griechenland abtreten und sich in Artikel 23 „aller Rechte und Ansprüche auf den italienischen Territorialbesitz in Afrika, d. h. Libyen, Eritrea und Italienisch-Somaliland“ begeben, wobei diese Besitzungen bis zur endgültigen Verfügung noch unter der gegenwärtigen (britischen) Verwaltung bleiben sollten. Artikel 25 hob das Pachtverhältnis der italienischen Konzession von einem halben Quadratkilometer im chinesischen Tientsin [29] auf, und in Artikel 27 anerkannte Italien die Souveränität und Unabhängigkeit Albaniens; dasselbe in Artikel 33 gegenüber der Souveränität und Unabhängigkeit des Staates Äthiopien, dem Italien nach Artikel 37 auch alle Kunstwerke, religiösen Gegenstände, Archive und Gegenstände von historischem Wert zurückerstatten musste.

Dass Außenminister Sforza in der italienischen „Costituente“ (der 1946–1948 tagenden verfassunggebenden Nationalversammlung) am 24. Juli 1947 anlässlich der Ratifizierungsdebatte den Friedensvertrag als anachronistisch und ungerecht und als Relikt des 18. Jahrhunderts qualifizierte,[30] erstaunt nach allem Gesagten nicht sonderlich;

[26] Varsori 1993: 125.

[27] Cf. Varsori 1993: 142.

[28] Cf. Varsori 1993: 142.

[29] Cf. Moos 2014: 1135.

[30] Cf. Sforza 1952: 17–34; Lepore und Sforza 2017: 15–23.

erstaunlicher dürfte sein, dass ein renommierter Mailänder Historiker (mit vielen anderen) dieses Urteil erheblich später noch immer geteilt zu haben scheint.[31]

3 Postkoloniale Nachspiele

Wie bei den Achsenpartnern Deutschland und Japan hörte auch für Italien mit der militärischen Niederlage nicht einfach ‚alles' auf. Trotz der kurzen Phase der „cobelligeranza" blieb die Sorge um die internationale Rolle und die Kollokation im Mächtespiel weiter aktuell, ebenso der Blick auf ehemals beherrschte oder okkupierte Räume und die dortige italienische Bevölkerung sowie das Interesse an ihrer Zukunft und allenfalls der Versuch einer Weiterführung irgendeiner Form von Kontrolle.[32]

Ausser einigen architektonischen Überresten wie in Asmara, der Hauptstadt von Eritrea (dazu unten Abschn. 4.2), blieb im einstigen Kolonialreich von Italien allerdings wenig, und – wie es scheint – eher Negatives. In Abessinien war ohnehin alles provisorisch gewesen und bestand vornehmlich in Absichtserklärungen. Am meisten musste hier angesichts der Kürze der Herrschaft die Idee einer Einwanderungskolonie scheitern, in Libyen aber auch jene der agrarischen Siedlungskolonie, denn in Wahrheit handelte es sich um Unterwerfungskolonien einheimischer Bevölkerungen, die kaum weniger rassistisch und brutal als jene älterer Kolonalmächte behandelt wurden.[33]

Andererseits ersparte das frühe und rasche Ende seines Kolonialreichs Italien die Dekolonisierungsprobleme etwa Grossbritanniens auf dem Subkontinent oder Frankreichs in Indochina und Algerien oder Belgiens im Kongo. Dafür bezeugt das EUR-Quartier im Südwesten Roms als transvestierte Erbschaft einer 1942 nicht zustande gekommenen Weltausstellung, der *Esposizione 42* (E42), die die Weltgeltung des Faschismus hätte zelebrieren wollen, ein nachhaltiges Fortleben des Faschismus,[34] das sich nicht nur architektonisch wie im legendär-wahrzeichenhaften „colosseo quadrato", der ein als permanent gedachtes Museum der „Civiltà italiana" hätte beherbergen sollen, sondern besonders peinlich an den nostalgischen Pilgerreisen zu Mussolinis Grab in Predappio in der Romagna fassen lässt [35] und sich neuerdings etwa im Habitus des lautstarken einstigen Innenministers Matteo Salvini wieder mehr politisch äussert.

Dass der Verlust des Kolonialreichs Vorteile haben konnte, wurde lange nicht gesehen. Vielmehr wurden in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit von fast allen Seiten Rettungsversuche des Imperiums oder von Teilen davon unternommen oder zumindest die Forderung nach solchen erhoben, nicht nur von Aussenminister Sforza ab 1947,

[31] Vigezzi 1990: 7.
[32] Cf. Tagungsbericht 2018.
[33] Cf. Moos 2014: 1155.
[34] Cf. Moos 2014: 1156–1157.
[35] Cf. Mattioli 2010.

sondern im ganzen politischen Spektrum vom liberalen Benedetto Croce zu Democristiani wie De Gasperi und anderen [36] bis zu den Sozialisten oder Kommunisten Nenni und Togliatti (bei ihnen jedenfalls bis 1948),[37] denn die Kolonien hätten „il ricordo più evidente del passato di ‚grande potenza'" repräsentiert, die 1943 aufgehört habe.[38]

Graf Carlo Sforza (1872–1952, Aussenminister 1947–1951), Karrierediplomat und schon 1920/1921 unter Giovanni Giolitti in dessen letzter Regierung ein erstes Mal Aussenminister, war nach dem Marsch auf Rom als italienischer Botschafter in Paris am 30. Oktober 1922 zurückgetreten und wirkte in der Folge als prominenter Mussolini-Gegner ab 1927 in Belgien und Frankreich und 1940 bis 1943 in den USA als eine Art Diplomat des demokratischen Antifaschismus im Exil.[39] Im Mai 1948 wäre er anstelle von Luigi Einaudi fast Präsident der Republik geworden, hätte er nicht Teile der DC-Linken und insbesondere die Kommunisten gegen sich gehabt.[40] Gerade Sforza erschien nun bezüglich der Kolonien als grosser und vielleicht als der grösste Überzeugungstäter, wohl ohne es wirklich gewesen zu sein.[41] Seit dem 18. Oktober 1943 zurück in Italien, plädierte er schon in einer Rede am 29. Januar 1944 in Bari für eine Rettung der Kolonien; dasselbe wieder im Teatro dell'Eliseo im eben befreiten Rom am 20. August 1944, als er alle möglichen Vorschläge formulierte, um von ihnen zu retten, was zu retten möglich schien.[42] Dies in der (von allen Seiten bis zum Überdruss proklamierten) Überzeugung, dass der Kriegsaustritt 1943 und die Gemeinsamkeit mit den Alliierten alles Vorherige gleichsam ungeschehen gemacht habe, was auch im Sinn des befreundeten und bewunderten grossen idealistischen Philosophen Benedetto Croce war,[43] für den der Faschismus ohnehin nur eine Parenthese oder eine schwere Erkrankung der italienischen Geschichte war, wonach wieder an die Zeit vorher angeknüpft werden konnte.[44] Insofern war es folgerichtig, dass Sforza 1944 als Italiens Mission eine Fortsetzung des Risorgimento sah, die dem Land diesmal – anders als nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg – eine „vittoria

[36] Cf. Del Boca 1992: 165–227; Labanca 2002: 428–433.

[37] Cf. Rainero 1990: 359–367.

[38] Vigezzi 1990: 5.

[39] Lepore und Sforza 2017: 20.

[40] Togliatti qualifizierte ihn als „servile marine americano"; Cf. Sforza 1952: 374–380; Zeno 1975.

[41] Sforza 1952; Zeno 1975: 205–206.

[42] Cf. Sforza 1946: 238–269.

[43] Cf. Zeno 1975: 413–434.

[44] Am 11. März 1947 äusserte Croce anlässlich der Autonomie-Diskussion in der Assemblea Costituente: „L'idea delle Regioni come organismi amministrativi apparve già nei primi anni dell'unità [. . .. . .]. Ma ora, dopo la parentesi fascistica e la guerra sciagurata al seguito della quale vecchi malanni si risvegliano, come in un organismo che ha sofferto una grave malattia, contrasti di Nord e di Sud, di Italia insulare e di Italia continentale, pretese e gelosie regionali e richieste di autonomie, si son fatti sentire, con gran dolore di chi, come noi, crede che il solo bene che ci resti intatto degli acquisti del Risorgimento sia l'unità statale che dobbiamo mantenere saldissima [...]." Zit. in Le Regioni, Torino 1971: 450.

morale“ und einen „posto d’onore nel mondo“ sichern würde.[45] Und wenn möglich, dafür war er eitel genug,[46] unter seiner Führung, die sich indessen nur teilweise als Aussenminister und nicht als Regierungschef einstellen wollte. Trotz visionärer Züge [47] blieb er letztlich ein traditioneller wenngleich hellsichtiger Realpolitiker im Sinne Cavours, mit Anleihen beim (in der Art von Mussolinis Hofphilosophen Giovanni Gentile)[48] eher missverstandenen Mazzini, während er sich – wenn seine föderalistischen Vorstellungen echt waren, wie sie es bezüglich eines neuen Europa wohl waren [49] – eher am 1869 im Tessiner Exil verstorbenen Mailänder 1848er Carlo Cattaneo hätte orientieren müssen.[50]

Am 2. Februar 1947, bei Übernahme des Aussenministeriums als Nachfolger des neutralistisch eingestellten kurzzeitigen Pietro Nenni (Aussenminister vom 19. Oktober 1946 bis zum 2. Februar 1947), fand Sforza nach eigener Aussage zwei Direktiven vor „per far ritornare l’Italia sul piano della dignità nazionale e internazionale“: positiv unter Verwendung von allem „che di buono e di men buono poteva servire a rimetterci nel circuito mondiale“ sowie negativ durch das Vermeiden einer „impostazione nazionalistica“.[51] Ersteres fiel leicht und wurde fast zu exzessiv betrieben. Dagegen wurde in der Praxis die zweite Direktive weitgehend ignoriert, indem die nationalistische Karte bei jeder Gelegenheit ausgespielt wurde, obwohl Sforza sich bemühte, vom faschistischen „nazionalismo morboso“, der zur „proclamazione dell’impero“, zum „connubio“ mit Hitler und zur „terribile avventura bellica dal `40 al `43“ geführt habe, wegzukommen.[52]

Nach der Ratifizierung des Friedensvertrags durch die Costituente, als Sforza in seiner pragmatisch gehaltenen Annahme-Rede am 24. Juli 1947 immerhin einräumte, dass dieser, obwohl als anachronistisch beurteilt,[53] weniger eine Niederlage sanktioniere als eine seit 1922 betriebene „politica immorale e sbagliata“,[54] setzte sofort „a long struggle for its revision“ ein,[55] ein Kampf, der sich in erster Linie um Triest drehte und sofort in den Sog des beginnenden Kalten Kriegs geriet, während auch wiederholt versucht wurde, die Ex-Kolonien in UNO-Treuhandgebiete zu verwandeln oder zumindest Tripolitanien mit einer Treuhandschafts-Dreiteilung Libyens zwischen Italien, Grossbritannien und Frankreich zu retten. Letzteres war in erster Linie der Zweck des Bevin-Sforza-Agreements

[45] Sforza 1946: 280.
[46] Cf. Romano 2010.
[47] Cf. Sforza 1946: 285.
[48] Cf. Gentile 1944.
[49] Cf. Sforza 1952: 36.
[50] Cf. Zeno 1975: 382–387; Moos 1992.
[51] Sforza 1952: 11.
[52] Sforza 1952: 12.
[53] Sforza 1952: 32–34.
[54] Sforza 1952: 19.
[55] Seton-Watson 1980: 172; Poggiolini 1990: 151.

von anfangs Mai 1949,[56] wobei es britischerseits vielleicht mehr darum ging, das seit der politischen Flurbereinigung in den für die Democrazia Cristiana gegen die kommunistisch-sozialistische Volksfront überwältigend siegreichen Aprilwahlen 1948 [57] klar westlich orientierte Italien für den Nordatlantikpakt, die NATO, zu gewinnen.

Zwar hatte Sforza schon am Tag der Unterzeichnung des Friedensvertrags (11. Februar 1947) allen unterzeichnenden Regierungen mitgeteilt, die „espiazione del popolo italiano" für „tanti errori passati" sei so hart ausgefallen, dass man sich als Italiener und als Weltbürger das Recht auf eine „revisione radicale" vorbehalte.[58] Doch gerade an den „Weltbürgern" sollten die kolonialistischen Revisionsversuche scheitern. Entgegen Sforzas Hoffnungen, der Ende Juli 1947 in der Costituente noch angenommen hatte, die UNO (in die Italien wegen verschiedener sowjetischer Veto-Einsätzen erst 1955 aufgenommen wurde) wäre der Weg „che pacificamente ci potrà avviare verso la revisione del Trattato",[59] lehnte die Generalversammlung, der das Problem der vorfaschistischen italienischen Kolonien mangels einer bis Mitte September 1948 nicht erfolgten Einigung der „Grossen Vier" nach zahlreichen Peripetien übertragen worden war, im Frühjahr 1949 das Bevin-Sforza-Agreement knapp ab und beschloss im Herbst 1949, Libyen in die Unabhängigkeit zu entlassen und Somalia für zehn Jahre der Treuhandverwaltung Italiens zu unterstellen, sowie ein Jahr später (Ende 1950) Eritrea föderativ mit Äthiopien zu vereinigen.[60] Offensichtlich hegte man Zweifel an Sforzas Argumenten, die er in einem Memorandum zur Zeit der Pariser Friedenskonferenz den „Grossen Vier" unterbreitet hatte, wonach die Italiener besonders geeignet wären, ihre Kolonien „gradualmente" der Autonomie als Basis einer dauerhaften „collaborazione" und „coabitazione" von Italienern und Eingeborenen („indigeni") zuzuführen.[61]

Nachdem Sforza in einer grossen Rede vor der UNO-Generalversammlung am 11. April 1949 noch erfolglos sämtliche Überzeugungshebel zur Rettung der italienischen Rolle in Somalia, Libyen und Eritrea gezogen hatte [62] und nach dem ebenso erfolglosen Arrangement-Versuch mit dem britischen Aussenminister Bevin schlug er in einer mit Ministerpräsident De Gasperi abgesprochenen [63] Flucht nach vorn am 1. Oktober 1949 der Generalversammlung selber vor, ganz Libyen und insbesondere Eritrea (hier aber vergeblich) in die Unabhängigkeit zu entlassen und für eine beschränkte Zeit das Mandat für Somalia zu übernehmen,[64] womit er sich angesichts der Gesamtlage gut (in seiner Optik

[56] Cf. Sforza 1952: 129–161; Zeno 1975: 242–243.
[57] Cf. Woller 1988: 69–94.
[58] Sforza 1952: 17.
[59] Sforza 1952: 23–27.
[60] Cf. Varsori 1993: 159; Labanca 2002: 433; Zeno 1975: 244–246, 481.
[61] Sforza 1952: 125.
[62] Cf. Sforza 1952: 145–157; Zeno 1975: 241–242.
[63] Cf. Sforza 1952: 162–163.
[64] Cf. Sforza 1952: 171–183.

„innovativ“) positionierte [65] und Italien zum Paladin der „indipendenza delle popolazioni africane“ machte, wie er meinte,[66] während sich in Wahrheit die Sowjetunion, der Ostblock und verschiedene arabische und asiatische Staaten und selbst Tripolitanien (wo die Italiener verhasst waren) gegen die italienischen Aspirationen gestellt hatten. Insofern lässt sich zu Recht festhalten, dass Italiens Frontwechsel im Herbst 1943 zwar das Mutterland rettete, nicht aber seine Kolonien, die der mittlerweile ausgebrochene Kalte Krieg umgekehrt vor einem erneuten italienischen Zugriff bewahrte.

Wenn sich bezüglich Somalias noch eine kolonialistische Coda ergab, das 1950–1960 italienisches UNO-Treuhandgebiet wurde, so nicht weil den italienischen Wünschen nach einer ohnehin unerreichbaren Parität mit den Briten und Franzosen in Europa [67] hätte entsprochen werden sollen, sondern weil die UNO-Generalversammlung im November 1949 – vielleicht als Folge des hochemotionalisierten „eccidio di Mogadiscio“, der 1948 in Mogadiscio erfolgten Ermordung von 54 Italienern und 14 Somaliern, während sich die britische Verwaltung seltsam verhielt [68] – hier anders als bei Libyen für Italien positiv entschied, obwohl Äthiopien dagegen war. Somalia sei eben, wie Sforza Bevin am 23. Februar 1948 beschönigend geschrieben hatte, von allen früheren italienischen Kolonien jene, wo „some form of italian administration – of course under trusteeship – encounters the least opposition, either on the part of the Powers or on the part of the local population“. Persönlich würde er allerdings, wie er weiter angab, lieber einen gigantischen Wiederaufbau im Süden (gemeint im italienischen Mezzogiorno) sehen als einen Penny in Afrika auszugeben; aber gegen gewisse Traditionen könne man nichts unternehmen und nicht gegen den Strom schwimmen und er sei bereit, „to create a new form of life on the territories where we will go back to“. [69]

Nach einem hoffnungsvollen Beginn nach der Unabhängigkeit von 1960 [70] kam es in den 1970ern und 1980ern zu kriegerischen Auseinandersetzungen Somalias mit Äthiopien um Ogaden und zu guter Letzt – nach der Flucht des Diktators Siad Barre vor einer Rebellenarmee – in den 1990er-Jahren zum Bürgerkrieg, während die letzten Italiener das Land verliessen. Mittlerweile dürfte Somalia als einer der massivsten *failed States* des Planeten zu gelten haben. Ob die einstige Kolonialmacht dafür nicht doch eine Verantwortung trägt? Jedenfalls erscheint die Aufbauarbeit staatlicher Strukturen, die in den 1950er-Jahren von der Treuhandschafts-Administration vorangetrieben wurde, im Nachhinein klar gescheitert.

Trotz dem Fiasko der italienischen Kolonial-Rettungsversuche wurde der glücklose und insgesamt verhängnisvolle Mittelmeer-Missionsgedanke keineswegs aufgegeben.

[65] Cf. Sforza 1952: 129.
[66] Cf. Sforza 1952: 171.
[67] Cf. Reinero 1990: 73–77.
[68] Cf. Sforza 1952: 139–141.
[69] Cf. Sforza 1952: 142–144.
[70] Cf. Seton-Watson 1980: 174.

Nachdem die im Äthiopien angegliederten Eritrea noch verbliebenen Italiener das Land 1962 nach Aufhebung von dessen Autonomiestatus verlassen hatten, vertrieb Gaddafi in der ersten Hälfte der 1970er-Jahre auch die in Libyen zurückgebliebenen Italiener. Trotzdem kam es in einem zeitlich gänzlich anderen Umfeld zu Silvio Berlusconis nahezu unterwürfigen Arrangements mit dem libyschen Diktator, der Italien – für einmal unüblich konsequent – aus Gaddafis Sturz heraushielt, weshalb für die sinistren Folgen die ‚anderen' und wegen des Vorpreschens des damaligen Präsidenten Sarkozy vor allem die Franzosen verantwortlich gemacht werden können. Dennoch erhob Matteo Renzi in seiner dreijährigen arrogant-glücklosen Regierungszeit unter Berufung auf die abgedroschene Tradition der „quarta sponda italiana" (der vierten italienischen Küste jenseits des tyrrhenischen Meeres) einen Regie-Anspruch gegenüber dem auseinandergebrochenen Libyen, der folgenlos bleiben musste, weil keinerlei Bereitschaft zu einem Truppeneinsatz bestand. In der Folge betrieb Italien seine tragikomische Konkurrenz zu Frankreich mit dem grossmäuligen Innenminister Salvini nicht nur in der Libyenfrage weiter. Unter anderem wurde sie von Emmanuel Macrons Libyenkonferenz vom 29. Mai 2018 im Elysée ausgelöst, anlässlich welcher libysche Wahlen für den 10. Dezember 2018 ausgemacht wurden, die nach den Septemberkämpfen 2018 in Tripolis obsolet wurden.[71] Ob die Lösung des Libyenproblems tatsächlich über einen „chiarimento strategico tra Italia e Francia" führen muss, wie der Corriere della Sera am 21. September 2018 anmahnte, [72] dürfte weiter fraglich bleiben, auch nachdem die populistische „legastellati"-Regierung (von Lega und Cinque Stelle-Bewegung) Anfang September 2019 geplatzt war.

Obwohl oder vielleicht gerade weil Asmara heute noch am ehesten italienisch wirkt, will von den inzwischen Zehntausenden aus Eritrea Geflohenen kaum jemand in Italien bleiben (2015 waren es 475 von rund 40.000), „forse perché è come se ci fossero cresciuti", wie der Corriere della Sera im Mai 2016 vermutete, und sie trotz der „architettura modernista dei nostri anni venti e trenta" sowie dem „cocktail Negroni", dem „caffé macchiato" und der „ferrovia da Massaua ad Asmara, capolavoro della nostra ignegneria" aus ihrem Land geflohen seien, womit trotz einem durchschimmernden italienischen Nationalstolz doch eine schwierige historische Erbschaft eingeräumt wurde.[73] Von ihr sprach ein anderer Corriere-Artikel im August 2017, der daran erinnerte, „[come] eravamo noi là, a casa loro", und wo sich gleichfalls solche trotz negativem Kontext seltsam durchzogene Anflüge von Nationalstolz finden: „E certo la nostra storia, per quanto costituita fortunatamente anche dal buon lavoro e dalla stima guadagnata da tanti nostri connazionali, non è una storia di cui andare fieri."[74]

Möglich, dass sich als Folge des nach fast zwanzigjährigen Konflikten im Juli 2018 geschlossenen Friedens zwischen dem seit 1993 unabhängigen Eritrea und Äthiopien alles

[71] Cf. Cremonesi 2018.

[72] Venturini 2018.

[73] Farina 2016.

[74] Stella 2017.

positiv ändern könnte,[75] was indessen nicht im geringsten das Verdienst der ehemaligen Kolonialmacht wäre. Diese war unter den damaligen Verhältnissen ohnehin nicht mehr in der Lage, eine aktive Aussenpolitik zu führen, die mehr politische Substanz gehabt hätte als populistische Endlos-Polemiken gegen die Europäische Union und den noch immer gemeinsamen Euro.

So oder so wurden die französischen Erfahrungen in Algerien und die belgischen im Kongo für Italien insofern heilsam, als koloniale Nostalgien oder imperialer Katzenjammer („hangover", wie Seton-Watson sagt) keine Themen mehr sein konnten und können. Deshalb entpuppt sich der Umstand, dass die kolonialen Rettungsversuche scheiterten, ex post als klarer Glücksfall.

4 Einordnung

4.1 Was unterscheidet das faschistische von anderen Imperien?

Der Napoleon-Spezialist Jean Tulard sah (wenig überraschend) das faschistische Kolonialreich nicht als Imperium, weil der Faschismus zwar vom antiken Rom inspiriert, Mussolini aber kein Imperator, sondern nur ein Diktator gewesen sei („Mussolini n'est en rien un empereur, seulement un dictateur").[76] Davide Rodogno meint, dass man mit dieser Äußerung bezüglich der Leistungen des faschistischen Regimes einverstanden sein könne, nicht aber in Bezug auf das imperiale Projekt der Beherrschung von Raum durch Eroberung, Faschisierung und straffe Führung in der Zentrale.[77] Mir scheint Rodognos Interpretation an sich zutreffend, müsste jedoch ihrerseits relativiert werden, denn Tulards Beurteilung von Mussolini als bloßer Diktator ist zwar in der Tat allzu verharmlosend, indessen gelangte Mussolini selbst über sehr bescheidene Ansätze einer „Romanisierung" seines Mittelmeer-Imperiums nicht hinaus. Vor allem muss aber bedacht werden, dass es sich gemäss den äusserst heterogenen Kriterien betreffend Raum, Macht, Dauer, Struktur, Reichweite, Performanz, Ideologie und Nachwirkung eines Imperiums[78] beim italienischen nicht ‚wirklich' um ein solches gehandelt haben kann, sondern um einen abstrusen wenngleich handfest folgenreichen Traum von einem solchen im Sinne einer falsch verstandenen und geradezu pervertierten *translatio imperii*, die sich an einem propagandistisch idealisierten, aber umfangmässig ‚echten' (weil es das Mittelmeer tatsächlich in seiner Gänze umfasste) römischen Imperium orientierte, dem es in keinster Weise nachzufolgen vermochte, weder territorial noch kulturell noch missionarisch noch

[75] Cf. Neue Zürcher Zeitung vom 9. Juli 2018 sowie die Mailing-List Prima Ora del Corriere della Sera vom 16. September 2018.

[76] Tulard 1997: 14.

[77] Cf. Rodogno 2006: 42–44.

[78] Cf. Gehler und Rollinger 2014: 1–32; Moos 2014: 1145–1153.

sonstwie zivilisatorisch. Von einer auch nur annähernd erreichten „pax romana“ war das Mussolini-Reich so weit wie nur möglich entfernt; vielmehr blieb es in einer lediglich vorbereitenden, aber immer weiter brutalisierten Eroberungsphase stecken.

All dies gilt, selbst wenn sich die Beschwörung Roms im Kontext der faschistischen Imperial-Politik nicht nur propagandistisch aufdrängte, sondern mit einer gewissen Penetranz bei jeder Gelegenheit zelebriert wurde. Dies ging so weit, dass einzelne Propagatoren noch mitten im Zweiten Weltkrieg und trotz allen Rückschlägen von einem Organisations-Modell nach altrömischen *provinciae* und *coloniae* im Rahmen des *orbis romanus* schwärmten,[79] während für das faschistische *Establishment* die Vorstellung eines Herrschaftsraums, der das Mittelmeer und den Balkan umfasste, geradezu eine Selbstverständlichkeit war.[80] In der Hauptstadt wurde der Rom-Bezug mit massiven urbanistischen Eingriffen aller Art ohnehin direkt hergestellt. Ihre Resultate erscheinen allerdings angesichts der von Mussolini angeordneten Auskernungen („sventramenti“) und Freilegungen etwa bei den Kaiserforen, wofür ganze Stadtquartiere zerstört wurden, bis hin zur Isolierung prestigeträchtiger Monumente wie des Augustusmausoleums mit der danebengelegenen Ara pacis im Nachhinein äusserst fragwürdig.[81] Dass der Rom-Bezug vom Faschismus auch bis in die hinterste Ecke Italiens forciert wurde, zeigt sich paradoxerweise ausgerechnet im deutschsprachigen Südtirol.[82]

In einem schönen Diskussionsvotum nach meinem Vortrag in Hildesheim hat Robert Rollinger das italienische Kolonialimperium als Windschatten-Imperium interpretiert, das im aufkommenden Sturm wie ein Kartenhaus zusammenbrach. Die Qualifizierung hat sehr viel für sich, weil Mussolinis lediglich propagandistisch raumgreifende Mittelmeer-Politik tatsächlich nur im Windschatten des Hitlerreichs denkbar war. Dies zeichnete sich schon anlässlich der Eroberung Abessiniens ab, als das Dritte Reich die Sanktionen des Völkerbunds (dem es gar nicht mehr angehörte) gegen Italien unterlief und damit nicht nur zu deren weitgehender Wirkungslosigkeit beitrug, sondern in der Folge mit Italien im Schlepptau das tragische Scheitern des Völkerbunds bewirkte, dessen wichtigste Zielsetzung die Kriegsverhinderung gewesen wäre.

Alle diese Überlegungen zielen darauf ab, dass die Qualifizierung des Mussolini-Reiches als Imperium wenig angemessen erscheint. Eher müsste man von einem gescheiterten Bemühen reden, Italien in Ost- und Nordafrika zu einer regionalen Hegemonialmacht zu machen.[83] Ansatzweise liesse sich Mussolinis Reich auch als ephemeres und weitgehend improvisiertes Kriegsimperium neben Napoleons Empire

[79] Quartara 1942; Rodogno 2006: 50.

[80] Cf. Rodogno 2010: 224.

[81] Cf. Schieder 2009: 65–86; Isler 2010: 67–100; Moos 2014: 1157.

[82] Cf. Strobl 2018: 685–720.

[83] Cf. Gehler und Rollinger 2014: 10–11.

oder Hitlers grossgermanisches Reich stellen;[84] aber gerade diese Nebeneinanderung massiver Ungleichheiten zeigt die Fragwürdigkeit solcher Klassifizierungen frappant.

Der vielleicht zentralste Unterschied des italienischen zu anderen Imperien dürfte aber in den *markanten Kontinuitäten* liegen, die Italiens Kolonialismus als Fortsetzung des Risorgimento, Italiens Einigungsprozess, erscheinen lassen, denn die neuere italienische Geschichte bildet vom Risorgimento bis zum Faschismus in vielem eine Einheit, während ein zumindest versuchter Bruch sich erst nach Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs ergab.

Neben einem erheblichen kulturellen Sendungsbewusstsein, das literarisch zu Dante und Petrarca und politisch bezeichnenderweise auf Machiavelli zurückgeführt wurde, wies das Risorgimento eine stark aggressive Entwicklungslinie auf, die sich in der Auseinandersetzung mit dem „Erbfeind" Habsburg zunächst mehr verbal und in zivilen Protestgesten artikulierte, in der Folge aber zunehmend den Kampf suchte. Als *stranieri* mussten die Habsburger spätestens nach 1848 aus dem Land vertrieben werden, wozu freilich die Waffenhilfe Napoleons III. unerlässlich war. Paradoxerweise war dann ausgerechnet Zita von Bourbon-Parma, die letzte Kaiserin des Habsburgerreiches, italienischer Herkunft, deren Ruf freilich wegen der unglücklichen Sixtus-Affäre nach dem gescheiterten Ausstiegsversuch aus dem Weltkrieg mit Hilfe ihrer als belgische Offiziere auf der Entente-Seite dienenden Brüder katastrophal beschädigt wurde.[85]

Die aggressive Linie des Risorgimento setzte sich nach der Einigung mit der Forderung nach Vereinigung aller italienischsprachigen Gebiete verstärkt fort. Der sogenannte Irredentismus, der Ruf nach den „terre irredente", den unerlösten Gebieten, zeigte sich ansatzweise schon bei Cavour, dem anfangs März 1861 – allerdings nur als Gedankenspiel – eine Vergrösserung der Schweiz durch Vorarlberg und Tirol bei parallel erfolgender Abtretung des Tessins an Italien vorschwebte, dann wenig später, aber erheblich deutlicher, beim Garibaldiner Nino Bixio, dessen Äusserung in der italienischen Kammer vom 29. Juni 1862, wonach Korsika, Malta, das Adriaufer und der Kanton Tessin italienisch seien, im Tessin und in der ganzen Schweiz vehemente Reaktionen und einen geharnischten Protest des Schweizer Bundesrates zur Folge hatte.[86] Nachdem der Erste Weltkrieg Italien mit Südtirol und dem Küstenland auch nichtitalienische Gebiete eingetragen hatte, wurde der Irredentismus besonders virulent, als sich Mussolini in Übersteigerung der Bixio-Linie nicht nur auf die italienischsprachigen Südschweizer Täler kaprizierte, sondern in den Kantonen Wallis und Graubünden – analog zu Südtirol – bis zum Alpenkamm vordringen wollte.

Wenig erstaunlich, knüpfte der in den 1880er-Jahren auflebende Kolonialismus an das irredentistische Gedankengut an und setze es quantensprunghaft fort, indem nebst den ersten am Roten Meer und am Golf von Aden gelegenen Zielen auch jenseits der italienischen Meere (dem adriatischen, dem ionischen und dem tyrrhenischen) gelegene

[84] Cf. Gehler und Rollinger 2014: 25.

[85] Cf. Moos 2016: 167–187.

[86] Cf. Bixio und Morelli 1942: 89; Chierichetti 2011: 261–317.

Gebiete einbezogen wurden. So wurde insbesondere Libyen programmatisch jeweils als vierte italienische Küste („quarta sponda d'Italia") gehandelt.

Insofern lässt sich festhalten, dass die italienische Kolonialpolitik letztlich durchaus als eine massive nationalistische Übersteigerung der Risorgimento-Aspirationen gesehen werden kann.

4.2 Hinterlassenschaft

Angesichts der relativen Kürze der italienischen Kolonialherrschaft (in Eritrea und Somalia rund 60 Jahre, in Libyen und auf den Dodekanes-Inseln rund 30 Jahre, in Äthiopien lediglich ein halbes Jahrzehnt) ist in Bezug auf ihre Wirkung wenig Bleibendes zu erwarten.

In erster Linie zeigen sich *architektonische Überreste*, deren Stellenwert und Bedeutung entsprechend der Dauer der italienischen Dominanz unterschiedlich sind. Am stärksten ist die Präsenz italienischer Kolonialarchitektur in Eritreas Hauptstadt Asmara, wo sich Zeugen des Baubooms und der Stadtplanung aus den letzten Jahren der italienischen Herrschaft finden, so einige repräsentative Bauten wie das den Weißen vorbehaltene Cinema Impero von Mario Messina (1937) oder die Casa del Fascio von Bruno Sclafani (1940) oder verschiedene futuristische Tankstellen wie die den Tragwerken eines Flugzeugs nachempfundene Fiat-Tankstelle von Giuseppe Pettazzi (1938). Asmaras Innenstadt gilt als eine der dichtesten und intaktesten Ansammlungen von Bauten der klassischen Moderne.[87]

Für knapp 16.000 aus dem Veneto, der Emilia-Romagna und Sizilien 1938 nach Libyen geführte Auswanderer wurden in kurzer Zeit über 30 Siedlungen gebaut, die an die Gründungsstädte im *Agro Pontino* südlich von Rom erinnern, aber wegen des Scheiterns des Konzepts der agrarischen Einwanderungskolonien (zur Bewältigung des Bevölkerungsdrucks im *Mezzogiorno)* mangels Bewohnern in einer menschenfeindlichen Wüste zu sich selber überlassenen Behausungen wurden.[88] Für die Eroberung Abessiniens mit motorisierten Truppen und zur Steigerung der Effizienz der Kriegsführung wurde ein Strassennetz buchstäblich aus dem Boden gestampft und systematisch erweitert, weshalb ein recht gutes Netz mit zahlreichen Kunstbauten entstand, das zu Ende des Reichs aber bei weitem nicht abgeschlossen war.[89]

Von besonderem Interesse sind im Architektur-Kontext aber dessen rassenpolitische Implikationen, weil sich das Prinzip der Rassentrennung schon 1908 im Bebauungsplan von Asmara und seit den mittleren 1920er-Jahren auch in den Plänen für die größeren libyschen Städte niederschlug. Vor allem deutlich wurde die Forderung nach städtebaulicher Rassentrennung indessen nach der Gründung der AOI, wie sie Kolonialminister

[87] Cf. Schwartz 2006; Mattioli 2009: 327–347; Bader 2009: 360; Moos 2014: 1158.

[88] Cf. Pergher 2009: 287–308; Moos 2014: 1155; Labanca 2002: 311–330.

[89] Cf. Mattioli 2009: 334–338.

Alessandro Lessona in einer Anweisung vom Juni 1936 formulierte. Auch wenn sie nur ansatzweise verwirklicht werden konnte, zeigen die Bebauungspläne, was intendiert war: Der Herrschaftsanspruch sollte architektonisch monumental fassbar werden, auch auf Kosten der ursprünglichen Bausubstanz, weshalb ganze Stadtviertel abgerissen oder durch Feuer zerstört wurden. In Addis Abeba wurden rund 100.000, in Mogadiscio 60.000, in Asmara 45.000 und in Godar 15.000 Afrikaner umgesiedelt. Die Rassentrennung sollte alle Lebensbereiche erfassen, auch die Freizeit in den Kinos und die Jenseitsvorstellungen in getrennten Kirchen und Friedhöfen.[90] Aus den Kolonien schlug das Apartheidkonzept dann auf das Mutterland zurück und fand seine sinistre Krönung in den Rassendekreten vom November 1938, deren Hauptziel die gesellschaftliche Segregation der Juden Italiens war.[91]

Wie oben im Zusammenhang mit Somalia angedeutet, müsste im Rahmen einer Nachgeschichte auch das Problem der fast überall unglücklichen Entwicklungen in den früher oder später in die Unabhängigkeit entlassenen ehemaligen Kolonien angesprochen werden. Dies kann aus wohl einleuchtenden Gründen hier nicht geleistet werden. Zum einen müsste die Nachkolonialzeit unter vergleichender Berücksichtigung möglichst aller einstigen Kolonialmächte in den Blick genommen werden: eine Riesenaufgabe, die für einen Einzelkämpfer nicht zu leisten wäre. Zum anderen ließen sich Wertungen kaum vermeiden, die sich indessen rasch als überheblich oder naiv oder oberflächlich oder besserwisserisch entpuppen würden; post festum ist (fast) immer (fast) alles klar. Darüber hinaus müsste das heuristische Problem der Nachgeborenen angesprochen werden, die kaum für Verhaltensweisen ihrer Vorgeborenen haftbar gemacht werden können, wobei symmetrisch auch das Umgekehrte zu gelten hätte, weil man selten für das Verhalten der Nachgeborenen Verantwortung trägt, sofern man nicht als Eltern oder Lehrer oder Politiker direkt in der Pflicht steht. Und schließlich stellte sich die fundamentale Frage nach dem, was als recht und was als unrecht zu gelten hat. Hier trüge etwa eine Orientierung an der Menschenrechtserklärung von 1948 historisch gesehen klar zu wenig weit.[92]

4.3 Aufarbeitung und Rezeption

Die eben erwähnten Grenzen der Erkenntnis ändern nichts an der Notwendigkeit der Aufarbeitung jeder Vergangenheit. Zum einen ist hier die *historiographische Auseinandersetzung* mit dem Faschismus und mit seiner Kolonialpolitik zu erwähnen.

[90] Cf. Schneider 2000: 197–265; Mattioli 2009: 342–347; Moos 2014: 1158.

[91] Cf. Moos 2004.

[92] Vgl. sehr erhellend zumUmgang mit kolonialer Vergangenheit Gesine Krüger, Afrikanisches Kulturerbe in europäischen Museen: Kann das weg? In: Geschichte der Gegenwart, 27. Januar 2019 (https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/afrikanisches-kulturerbe-in-europaeischen-museen-kann-das-weg/).

Sie ist – einem allgemeinen Trend folgend – zunehmend kritischer geworden. Nachdem primär Antifaschismus und *Resistenza* die Geschichtschreibung der italienischen Nachkriegszeit dominierten, ist mit Renzo De Felice und seiner zwischen 1965 und 1997 in insgesamt acht Bänden mit rund 8000 Seiten erschienenen monumentalen Mussolini-Biographie ein Paradigmenwechsel eingetreten, obwohl der Verfasser mit sehr weit getriebener Quellenausbreitung und trotz aller Differenziertheit letztlich eine Ehrenrettung Mussolinis und eine deutliche Verharmlosung des Faschismus gegenüber dem Nationalsozialismus versuchte, auch wenn unklar bleibt, wie sein letztgültiges Urteil ausgefallen wäre, weil der gerade in dieser Hinsicht zentrale abschließende Band des Riesenwerks fehlt und aus dem Nachlass nicht rekonstruiert werden konnte.[93] Trotzdem wurde die Faschismus-Forschung durch De Felice und die Auseinandersetzung mit ihm stark gefördert und erheblich kritischer.[94]

Nachdem eine kritische Diskussion der Kolonialgeschichte erst recht lange ausblieb [95] oder den Beschönigungen direkt Involvierter überlassen wurde,[96] ist mittlerweile auch sie vor allem von Angelo Del Boca und Nicola Labanca gründlich aufgearbeitet worden,[97] wobei die schwer zu fassende Perspektive der Betroffenen und generell die Sicht „von unten“ weiter zu vertiefen wären. In jüngerer Zeit lag der Akzent – mit einigen Überspitzungen seitens nichtitalienischer Historiker – vor allem auf dem Gewaltaspekt der faschistischen Überseegeschichte und, damit zusammenhängend, auf der Rassenpolitik.[98] Zu Recht in den Vordergrund rückte mehr und mehr auch die Rolle der Italiener als Besatzer in Frankreich, Jugoslawien und Griechenland. Dazu ist in erster Linie das 2006 englisch erschienene herausragende Buch von Davide Rodogno zu erwähnen,[99] welches die Beziehungen Italiens zum NS-Partner in den okkupierten Gebieten und die dort betriebene wirtschaftliche Ausbeutung, Italianisierung und Faschisierung analysiert sowie den Problemen von Kollaboration und Repression und dem Verhalten der Besatzer und Besetzten nachgeht. Auch im Kontext der mittlerweile vielfältigen kritisch-revisionistischen Bausteine gegenüber der verniedlichenden Formel von den Italienern als „brava gente“,[100] die sich von den „bösen“ Deutschen positiv unterschieden hätten, und vom italienischen Kolonialismus als einem „anderen“ und „menschlicheren“ ist Rodognos Beitrag von Bedeutung. Ihn ergänzend und zur Verfolgung der italienischen

[93] Cf. Moos 2004.

[94] Cf. Moos 2004.

[95] Cf. Del Boca 1992: 111–127.

[96] Zu recht erinnert Del Boca daran, dass zwischen 1935 und 1941 vielleicht eine Million Italiener (vor allem junge Männer zwischen 20 und 30) zeitweilig in Äthiopien waren und diese Zeit als Ausbruch aus dem tristen italienischen Alltag in ein afrikanisches Abenteuer empfanden; Del Boca 1992.

[97] Cf. Labanca 2002: 477–547.

[98] Cf. Schneider 2000; Mattioli 2005a; Mattioli 2005b: 155-178; Brogini Künzi 2006.

[99] Cf. Rodogno 2006; es handelt sich um Rodognos Genfer Dissertation.

[100] Cf. Moos 1994: 671–694.

Kriegsverbrecher in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit weiterführend, aber vor allem die direkten Folgen der Okkupation in den einzelnen Besatzungsgebieten und ihre Konzentrationslager fokussierend ist 2017 die Wiener Dissertation von Karlo Ruzicic-Kessler über die Italiener auf dem Balkan erschienen.[101] Der italienischen Armee in Slowenien geht im besonderen Amedeo Osti Guerazzi zwischen 1941 und 1943 nach.[102]

Was in der italienischen Historiographie letztlich noch immer eher fehlt, ist eine selbstkritischere Gesamtwertung der Kontexte von Kolonialismus, Imperialismus und faschistischem Aggressionskrieg. Bezeichnenderweise äusserte US-Staatssekretär Byrnes im Zusammenhang mit den Friedensverhandlungen und den italienischen Klagen über die angeblich ungerechte Behandlung am 18. Juli 1946 zum damals renommierten italienischen Botschafter in Washington Alberto Tarchiani folgendes: „Sono in politica da moltissimi anni e so che non si possono mai contentare i propri amici. Qualunque cosa facciate per loro non è mai abbastanza [. . .] Noi abbiamo dimenticato da un giorno all'altro che ci avevate dichiarato guerra, vi abbiamo stimati e aiutati come meglio potevamo [. . .] ma jugoslavi e greci che hanno subito le vostre invasioni [. . .] non sono altrettanto magnanimi e vogliono essere compensati [. . .].“[103] Ebenso wenig wie der seinem Regierungschef De Gasperi diese Äusserung unkommentiert mitteilende Botschafter hat auch später selten jemand die enorme Tragweite gerade der italienischen Rolle im Aggressionskontext vor und während dem 2. Weltkrieg thematisiert.

Neben den historiographischen Bemühungen wären zum andern noch *politische Polemiken* zu erwähnen, die sich seltsamerweise weniger direkt in Italien abspielen, als dass sie gegen die einstigen kolonialpolitischen Rivalen und insbesondere gegen Frankreich gerichtet sind.

In Italien selber stellte sich in den mittleren 1990er-Jahren allerdings eine lebhafte Polemik um den Giftgaseinsatz in Abessinien ein, die sich daran entzündete, dass der Starjournalist und Gründer des rechtslastigen „Giornale Nuovo“ Indro Montanelli den Einsatz von Giftgas vehement bestritt, weil er als junger Offizier in diesem Krieg nichts davon gesehen habe.[104]

Gegenüber Frankreich vermischte sich eine der zahlreichen Polemiken, die sich früher etwa um Tunesien drehten, seitens der populistischen „legastellati“-Regierung und insbesondere ihres aggressiven Innenministers Salvini mit schwer qualifizierbaren Vorwürfen gegen die französische Migrationspolitik, wozu einzelne Abschiebungen aus der französischen Riviera über die italienische Grenze gehörten, die giftige Pressefehden generierten. Ein besonders markanter Seitenzweig dieser Auseinandersetzungen ist aber (wie erwähnt) der Streit um eine führende Rolle im auseinander gebrochenen Libyen, wo Italien als einstige Kolonialmacht eine Leader-Funktion beansprucht und sich dafür als

[101] Ruzicic-Kessler 2017.

[102] Guerrazzi 2013.

[103] Poggiolini 1990: 71.

[104] Cf. Del Boca 1996: 28-44; Mattioli 2003: 310-337.

besonders befähigt erachtet, weil es am Sturz und Ende Gaddafis nicht beteiligt war. Demgegenüber scheint mir, dass der vorliegende Text ausreichend erweist, dass von einer diesbezüglich besonderen Befähigung nicht die Rede sein kann, was allerdings nicht heissen soll, dass Frankreich dafür besser geeignet wäre. Laut einem Bericht der Le Monde-Korrespondenten in Rom und Tunis vom 11. November 2018 ist es vielmehr gerade die französisch-italienische Rivalität, die die Situation in Libyen verkompliziert, denn „le dossier libyen est pollué depuis des années par les ressentiments et les arrière-penseés“ und dieser „spectacle du désaccord franco-italien“ habe in Libyen „un effet désastreux“. Seit den Pariser Attentaten vom 13. November 2015 privilegiere Frankreich „l'impératif antiterroriste“ und setze auf Marschall Haftar in Bengasi, während Italien den international anerkannten Ministerpräsidenten Sarraj in Tripolis präferiere, woher die meisten der 600.000 Migranten seit 2014 aufbrachen und wo die hauptsächlichen Installationen seines Energieriesen ENI angesiedelt seien.[105] Derart verknüpfen sich aktuelle Wirtschaftsinteressen sowie Terrorismus- und Migrationsängste mit den Erblasten der Kolonialzeit, deren Explosivität sie fast zu potenzieren scheinen.

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[105] Gautheret und Bobin 2018.

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The Rise and Fall of Hitler's Empire (1933–1945)

Arnold Suppan

According to Hitler's best biographer, Ian Kershaw, "no other individual has stamped a more profound imprint" on the twentieth century than Adolf Hitler:

> Hitler's dictatorship, far more than that of Stalin or Mao, has the quality of a paradigm for the twentieth century. In extreme and intense fashion it reflected, among other things, the total claim of the modern state, unforeseen levels of state repression and violence, previously unparalleled manipulation of the media to control and mobilize the masses, unprecedented cynism in international relations, the acute dangers of ultra-nationalism, and the immensly destructive power of ideologies of racial superiority and ultimate consequences of racism, alongside the perverted usage of modern technology and 'social engineering.' Above all [. . .]: it showed how a modern, advanced, cultured society can so rapidly sank into barbarity, culminating in ideological war, conquest of scarcely imaginable brutality and rapaciousness, and genocide such as the world had never previously witnessed. [. . .] The twelve years of Hitler's rule permanently changed Germany, Europe, and the world. He is one of the few individuals of whom it can be said with absolute certainty: without him, the course of history would have been different.[1]

[1] Kershaw (1999) (Until the present time, Hitler has stood uniquely as the quintessential hate-figure of the twentieth century).

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1 The Rise of Hitler's Empire (1933–39)

The answer to the question "how Hitler was possible [. . .] must be sought chiefly in German society" (Ian Kershaw). From the very beginning in 1919, Hitler condemned "Versailles," especially the war guilt of Germany and the reparations, and praised the idea of a "people's community" (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and of a united comradeship of front-line soldiers (*Frontgemeinschaft*). Hitler also agitated against "the Jews" as well as the "Jewish Bolshevik–regime" in the Soviet Union, and demanded "living space" (*Lebensraum*) for the German people "in the East." The Germans had to deal with the trauma of a lost war, the destruction of their old political system and a humiliating peace treaty that called on them to accept "guilt" for starting the war in the first place, and placed castigatory reparations on them. The economic situation became so bad that it seemed as if the whole financial infrastructure of the nation might collapse as hyperinflation hit in 1923. Therefore, many Germans asked themselves who was to blame for this horror? Hitler told the growing audiences at Munich that he could answer this question: "The bulk of the German population was not to blame for their misfortune, it was all, he claimed, the fault of the Jews."[2]

In the summer of 1928, Hitler dictated a "Second Book," dealing with the growing economic power of the United States and warning that the "threatened global hegemony of the North American continent" would reduce Europe to the status of Switzerland or Holland. At Whitsun 1929, Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann warned some men from the foreign office about Hitler: "He is the most dangerous man in Germany. He possesses a devilish rhetoric. He has an instinct for mass psychology like no-one else." By January 1930, four months after the Wall Street crash, there were more than four million Germans unemployed, a year later soon six million. "Six million unemployed means," said a young economist, "with three people in one family, six times three equals 18 million without food." Economic desperation led to violent confrontations on the streets, especially between the Communists and the *SA*, the stormtroopers of the *NSDAP*. Hitler tried to position himself as the political messiah who would guide Germans out of the chaos. After a dinner together with the steel tycoon Fritz Thyssen and the *Reichstag* deputy Hermann Göring in January 1931, even Hjalmar Schacht, the former President of the *Reichsbank*, was impressed by Hitler's skill as "a born agitator:"

> The thing that impressed me most about this man was his absolute conviction of the rightness of his outlook and his determination to translate this outlook into practical action. Even at this first meeting it was obvious to me that Hitler's power of propaganda would have a tremendous pull with the German population if we did not succeed in overcoming the economic crisis and weaning the masses from radicalism.[3]

[2] Kershaw (1999: 131–41), Thamer (2018: 97–110), Rees (2014: 21–23), Echternkamp (2018: 3–9), Hartmann et al. (2016).

[3] Kershaw (1999:225–357), Thamer (2018: 111–142), Rees (2014: 44–55), Wehler (2008: 259–422), Snyder (2015b: 8–27), Schacht (1955: 279–80), Kershaw (2015: 197–216).

After the *NSDAP* had won 37.4% (= 13.5 million voters) and 230 seats at the general election of 31 July 1932, Hitler demanded "the leadership of the state to its full extent," but the old Reich President Hindenburg rejected an appointment of Hitler to Reich Chancellor. A real "chess match for power" (Joseph Goebbels) started. On Monday, 30 January 1933, Hindenburg legally appointed Hitler as Reich Chancellor of Germany. On the same evening, sixty to eighty thousands of *SA* and *Stahlhelm* men held a torchlight procession through the Brandenburger Tor, and shouted: "One people, one Reich, one leader" (*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*).[4]

On 1 February, Hitler broadcast a call to the German people: He complained about the misery of mass unemployment, painted the looming specter of Bolshevism on the wall, and spoke of the duty for national unity and nation building. The German people should give him four years' time.—Hitler could govern based on the Reich President's emergency powers according to Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution. According to this article, the German president could "use armed force to restore order and safety" and suspend "the fundamental rights of the citizens." Hitler recognized the *Reichswehr* as the "most important institution of the state," and the generals knew that Hitler would endorse their program of comprehensive rearmament. "The conformity between Hitler's goal and those of the military leaders was one of the main guarantees of the stability of the regime in the following years. [. . .] For the *Reichswehr* this alliance represented primarily a domestic guarantee of its unchanged military and armaments objectives" (Wilhelm Deist).[5]

After the arson attack of a Dutch communist at the *Reichstag*, Hitler imposed a decree of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State: The first Communists, Social Democrats, and Jews were arrested and imprisoned at Dachau Concentration Camp; tens of thousands followed soon after. Because on 5 March 1933, the Germans had given only 43.9% to the *NSDAP* in the last general election, Hitler needed the support of other parties, especially the Catholic Center Party and German nationalist parties, to pass an Enabling Law in the new *Reichstag*. The hastily constructed emergency decree amounted to the charter of the Third Reich and was extended in 1937 and 1941. Two days before, on 21 March 1933, the Reich President and the Reich Chancellor—Hindenburg in the uniform of a Prussian field marshal, Hitler in a black, tailored suit—met themselves at the *Garnisonskirche* of Potsdam, symbolizing the union of the old and new Germany.[6]

In fewer than six months, all opposition parties and trade unions had been suppressed or gone into voluntary liquidation; in January 1934, the sovereignty of the *Länder* was also formally abolished, their institutions and organizations synchronized. The rapidity of the transformation of German society and the state was possible because of important strands

[4] Kershaw (1999: 363–429), Echternkamp (2018: 9–11), Rees (2014: 56–77), Thamer (2018: 148–159).

[5] Thamer (2018: 162–165), Davies (2006: 967), Deist (1986: 401), Noakes and Pridham (1995: 628–629).

[6] Thamer (2018 167–174), Thamer (1986: 256–274), Kershaw (1999: 459–478), Echternkamp (2018: 12–17), Rees (2014: 81–85), Evans (2005: 220–253), Cf. Falter (1991).

of continuity in German political culture stretching back to the First World War—chauvinism, imperialism, racism, anti-Marxism, glorification of war, caesaristic attractions of strong authority are some of them—as well as the readiness of traditionally powerful groups to put themselves at the service of the new regime. Between January and April 1933, the number of *NSDAP* members increased from 800,000 to 2 ½ million. "Working towards the Führer" functioned as the underlying maxim of the regime from the outset.[7]

When Hjalmar Schacht returned as President of the *Reichsbank*, Hitler found the person he needed to mastermind the secret and unlimited funding of rearmament. In cooperation with industrial leaders, at the *Reichsbank* Schacht set up the *Mefo*-Bills armament program, accepting bills of exchange issued by suppliers of the government. Through the disguised discounting of government bills by the *Reichsbank*, Schacht was soon able to guarantee the fantastic sum of 35 billion *Reichmark* over an eight-year period to the *Reichswehr*. The leadership of the *Reichswehr* demanded at the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva the "parity" in forces with France and "equality of status," at least the creation of a well-equipped twenty-one divisions field army. As Britain and France presented the German representatives only the minimal concession of the right to a 200,000-man army, Hitler pulled Germany out of the League of Nations, on 14 October 1933.[8]

While this step fatally weakened the League of Nations, Hitler found a diplomatic arrangement with Marshal Piłsudski's Poland signing a ten-year non-aggression pact on 26 January 1934. On 25 July 1934, a *SS* detachment occupied the Chancellery in Vienna and killed Federal Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuß, but the Nazi *putsch* in Vienna and some other *Bundesländer* failed. The international embarrassment for Hitler was enormous, the damage to relations with Mussolini considerable. However, when President Hindenburg died on 2 August 1934, Hitler started to act as "*Führer* and Reich Chancellor," while the post of the Reich President was abolished. Although Hitler automatically became Supreme Commander of the armed forces, on 20 August, every member of the armed forces and all public officials swore an oath of loyalty to Hitler personally as "*Führer* of the German Reich."[9]

Already in March 1935, Hitler felt confident enough to announce a new and large *Wehrmacht* of 36 divisions (about 550,000 men), and the reintroduction of general military

[7] Thamer (2018: 193–95), Echternkamp (2018: 17–20).

[8] Kershaw (1999: 434–469), Echternkamp (2018: 40–45), Kershaw (2015: 232), Steiner (2005: 755–784).

[9] Taylor (1964: 110–114), Borodziej (2010), Kindermann (2002: 16–18), Thamer (1986: 321–332), Kershaw (1999: 499–517), Rees (2014: 91–96), Evans (2005: 20–41), Echternkamp (2018: 23–24). When the leader of the SA, Captain Ernst Röhm, called for the German Armed Forces to be subordinated to the SA, Hitler sided with the Reichswehr and ordered the murder of fifty SA officers, including Röhm, at Bad Wiessee on 30 June 1934 and some days later at Munich and Dachau. However, in September 1934, the most influential and infamous propaganda film ever made about Hitler—Leni Riefenstahl's "Triumph of the Will" (Triumph des Willens)—was filmed at the Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg.

service. In the *Reichstag*, Hitler offered bilateral non-aggression pacts to all of his neighbors (except Lithuania), he promised to observe the Locarno Treaty including the demilitarization of the Rhineland, and he declared that Germany had no desire to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria. As each of these promises was later broken, it might be asked why he would make them and why anyone believed him.—However, a rich propaganda gift was about to fall into Hitler's lap with the return of the Saar region to Germany through the plebiscite of 13 January 1935.[10]

In Hitler's universe the Jews were an alien "counter-race," whose unnatural beliefs included dangerous and subversive politics. With the "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service" from 7 April 1933, the dismissal of "non-Aryans" from the civil service began. Because he saw the Jews as the "World Enemy Number One," Hitler announced a "Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor" at the Nuremberg party rally in September 1935, outlawing sexual contact and marriage between Jews and non-Jews, and a "Reich Citizenship Law" that excluded Jews from German citizenship and thus of civil protection and legal recourse. Hitler interwove his hatred of the Jews with his hatred of Stalin's regime in the Soviet Union, speaking of the rulers in Moscow as "an uncivilized Jewish-Bolshevik international guild of criminals."[11]

The most crucial institutional driving force of racial policy was the *SS* (*Schutzstaffel*—literally "Protection Squad"), "the elite section of the Nazi movement and its most ideologically dynamic sector, committed to the pursuit of 'racial cleansing' both to improve the 'political health of the nation' and to provide the basis for future German domination of Europe." From 1936 onward, the *SS*, led by the *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler, which had already been running the concentration camps, took over the leadership of the security and criminal police (*Sipo* and *Kripo*), separated the secret state police (*Gestapo*) from court control, constructing a huge surveillance network and eventually developing a military wing, the *Waffen-SS*. Therefore, "the threat of arrest, prosecution and incarceration in increasingly brutal and violent conditions loomed over everyone in the Third Reich."[12]

[10] Steiner (2011: 1–2), Sheehan (2008: 111), Kershaw (1999: 546–547), Taylor (1964: 117).

[11] While many Jewish intellectuals from Germany and Austria like Albert Einstein, Fritz Haber, Hans Kelsen, Erwin Schrödinger, and Joseph Schumpeter were forced into exile, the composer Richard Strauß and the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, the philosopher Martin Heidegger, the constitutional lawyer Carl Schmitt, the surgeon Ferdinand Sauerbruch, the actors Gustav Gründgens, Werner Krauß, and Emil Jannings as well as the poets Gerhart Hauptmann and Gottfried Benn put themselves at the disposal of the Nazi regime. Writings of Bertolt Brecht, Alfred Döblin, Sigmund Freud, Heinrich Heine, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Erich Kästner, Thomas Mann, Erich Maria Remarque, Kurt Tucholsky, Carl Zuckmayer, and Stefan Zweig were outlawed as decadent or materialistic, as representative of "moral decline" or "cultural Bolshevism." Their books and those of many others were burned on 10 May 1933 at the Opernplatz in Berlin and at many German universities; Thamer (1986: 301–465), Wehler (2008: 825), Rees (2014: 98–111), Kershaw (1999: 480–526), Thamer (2018: 178–204), Evans (2005: 536–554).

[12] Kershaw (2015: 286–288), Wehler (2008: 630–631), Thamer (2018: 196), Evans (2005: 81–118), Longerich (2008: 211–261), Echternkamp (2018: 66–69).

On 7 March 1936, Hitler used Mussolini's struggle with the Western Powers over his war against Abyssinia/Ethiopia and sent German troops into the demilitarized zone in the Rhineland. Of course, Hitler's order was a breach of the Treaty of Versailles and of the Treaty of Locarno. In stormy meetings in Paris and London, the British Government rejected sanctions against Germany; Mussolini signaled tacit support for Germany. The entire post-World War I security system began to collapse and lead to a complete reorientation of the policies of most of the European powers.[13] The authoritarian Austrian government, weakened by the Nazi German exit tax to Austria of 1000 *Reichsmark* per person (*Tausend-Mark-Sperre*), was still prepared to use both the phrases of Austrian patriotism and German nationalism. Now Envoy Papen convinced Chancellor Schuschnigg to conclude a Gentleman's Agreement on 11 July 1936. While Hitler recognized Austria's full sovereignty, Schuschnigg acknowledged that Austria was "a German State." However, Hitler assumed that Austrian Nazis would gradually penetrate the government there and would transform Austria into a National Socialist state.[14]

Still, Hitler wanted more. Already in September 1934, Schacht had made public the so-called "New Plan:" The German Reich based its foreign trade with most of its trading partners on bilateral trade and payment treaties. Not surprisingly, the New Plan automatically pointed the foreign trade of Germany in the direction of Southeastern Europe, towards Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Hitler's essay on the "Four-Year Plan" in August 1936 designated "the significant expansion of the living space, that is, the raw material and food product base of our people." Moreover, he demanded from his Cabinet that "I. The German armed forces must be operational within four years. II. The German economy must be fit for war within four years." Göring was appointed head a Four-Year Plan to increase spending on armaments. At Hitler's invitation, Mussolini visited Germany from 25 to 29 September 1937. Hitler was keen to show Mussolini the organized might and industrial strength of Germany, as well as the unified enthusiasm of the German people.[15]

Because of raw materials shortages in the spring and summer of 1936, German discussions appeared on the allocation of resources between the three military services. Although in 1936 over a third of public expenditure went towards rearmament, Hitler demanded a further increasing. Economics Minister Schacht was by now alarmed at the accelerating tempo of rearmament. However, Admiral Raeder felt his battleship building program was under threat because of a lack of steel; Göring needed more materials for his

[13] Weinberg (2010: 187–205), Taylor (1964: 130–34), Echternkamp (2018: 26–28).

[14] Text of the German-Austrian Communiqué, 11 July 1936, in Dgfp (1918: C, V, doc. 446, 449); cf. Adö (1918: 10, doc. 1640); Taylor (1964: 143–144). In August 1936, Hitler and Goebbels turned the Olympic Summer Games at Berlin into a vehicle of nationalist politics and propaganda as never before; Kershaw (1999: 5–9).

[15] Ránki (1983: 145–179), Kershaw (2015: 316), Evans (2005: 361–77), Weinberg (2010: 497–503), Rauscher (2001:225–251), De Felice (1974). Since July 1936, the German and Italian aid for General Francisco Franco in his uprising against the elected Spanish government of the left-wing Popular Front had brought Hitler and Mussolini closer together.

Luftwaffe; and Colonel General Werner von Fritsch demanded more for the panzers and artillery. So, Göring, Raeder, Fritsch, Blomberg, and Neurath were invited to a meeting with Hitler at the Reich Chancellery, on 5 November 1937. Surprisingly for the participants, Hitler started to read a long memorandum noting that in the interest of a long-term German policy his remarks should be heeded. Because Germany's problem was how to "solve the need for living space," he was resolved to force a union with Austria and eliminate Czechoslovakia at the latest by 1943–45. This would also involve, of course, potential conflict not just with France but also with Great Britain.[16]

When Hitler met Lord Halifax, on 19 November 1937, the future foreign secretary recognized during his visit to the *Berghof* "that the Chancellor had not only performed great services in Germany, but also, as he would no doubt feel, had been able by preventing the entry of Communism into his own country, to bar its passage further West." The English understood "that mistakes had been made in the Treaty of Versailles, which had to be put right." Therefore, Lord Halifax suggested that the British Government would accept a change through "peaceful evolution" in the status of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Danzig/Gdańsk, though he was keen to avoid "far-reaching disturbances."[17]

Although Hitler told Halifax he had no wish to annex Austria or to reduce her to political dependence, behind the scene, he was planning the annexation of Austria and dismembering Czechoslovakia to dominate the Bohemian-Moravian-Silesian region. In February 1938, Hitler played the German-national card of the "freeing" and including of the German-Austrians and the Sudeten Germans, and in September 1938 he claimed to want no more than to bring persecuted Germans "home to the Reich." Nevertheless, Hitler's main motivation was to incorporate the rich human and industrial potential of Austria and of the Bohemian lands, the important raw materials, the weapons of the Austrian and the Czechoslovak armies as well as the gold and foreign-currency reserves of the National Banks in Vienna and Prague into the German war economy. During the occupation and annexation of Austria, in mid-March 1938, hundreds of thousands Austrians welcomed Hitler on his way from Braunau via Linz to Vienna, while no state chancellery of the Great Powers or Little Entente protested (only Mexico sent a letter to the League of Nations!), even not against the humiliation of the Jews in the streets of Vienna. No doubt, the *Anschluss* was a watershed moment in the evolution of Hitler's charismatic attraction, although 154 political prisoners—particularly supporters of the Schuschnigg regime, and some sixty Jews—were sent to the Dachau Concentration Camp. Hitler had created "Greater Germany" (*Großdeutschland*) and won a triumph of enormous political and psychological significance.[18]

[16] Notes Colonel Hossbach, Berlin, 10 November 1937, in Adap, D, I, doc. 19; Wendt (1987: 187–202), Kershaw (2000: 27–58), Rees (2014: 112–124), Echternkamp (2018: 33–40).

[17] Dgfp, D, I, doc. 31.

[18] Wendt (1987: 191–202), Evans (2005: 646–688), Kennan (1971: 227–229), Taylor (1964: 10–188), Kershaw (2015: 322–328), Hanisch (1994: 337–347), Kershaw (2000: 65–86), Suppan (2015: 31–56), Mazower (2008: 46–52), Naimark (2015), Echternkamp (2018: 29–30).

US Ambassador to Berlin Hugh Wilson wrote to Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, discussing the *Anschluss*:

> [I]n calling attentation to Hitler's personal feelings in decisions of external policy, I do not wish to suggest that these decisions are made only on impulse or emotion. He has the profound political sagacity to give his resentment effective outlet only when conditions are propitious and when the most careful preparation has been made.[19]

Just two weeks after the *Anschluss*, Hitler met with Konrad Henlein and Karl Hermann Frank of the Sudeten German Party telling them to make a series of demands on the Czechoslovak government that he knew would be unacceptable. At the same time, Hitler instructed General Keitel to draw up plans for military action against Czechoslovakia. After a rash Czechoslovak mobilization, Hitler told his generals on 30 May 1938: "It is my unalterable intention to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future." During August 1938, the British indirectly exerted pressure on the Prague government to comply with the Sudeten German demands through the mission of Lord Runciman. However, Hitler threatened Czechoslovakia at the Nuremberg Party Congress on 12 September. The British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain could not believe that the Reich Chancellor would actually want another war and announced at the Berghof, on 15 September 1938, that he was prepared for the Sudeten Germans to leave Czechoslovakia. Therefore, together with the French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier, they put pressure on the Czechoslovak government to give up the Sudetenland. Nevertheless, a week later, at Bad Godesberg, Hitler formulated new demands, also for Poland and Hungary. When President Beneš announced the general mobilization of the Czechoslovak armed forces, Hitler declared in a speech at the Berlin *Sportpalast*, on 26 September 1938, that the Sudetenland was his last demand in Europe: "We don't want any Czechs at all!"—But this was a fake. Still, both the British as well as the German diplomacy requested Mussolini's intervention. Indeed, Hitler accepted Mussolini's proposal for a meeting of the four major powers. In the afternoon and in the evening of 29 September 1938 they negotiated the Munich Agreement on the cession of the Sudeten German territories to Germany. Beneš and the Czechoslovak government were forced to accept within hours. Chamberlain was fêted in Munich and at home as the actual savior of Europe's peace.[20]

Although until October 1938, Hitler had "brilliantly exploited the principle of 'self-determination'" (Zara Steiner), his essential aim versus Czechoslovakia was not the "freeing" of the Sudeten Germans but occupying the whole Bohemian–Moravian–Silesian region and their incorporation into Germany's war industry. For many Sudeten Germans the occupation and annexation of October 1938 was a revenge for the humiliations of

[19] Wilson to Hull, 24 March 1938, Cordell Hull Papers, folder 104, cit. Weinberg (1989: 516).

[20] Directive Hitler, 30 May 1938, in Dgfp (1918: D, XI, doc. 221); Taylor (1964: 208–231), Biman and Cílek (1985: 194–220), Kershaw (2000: 96–123), Rees (2014: 147–157).

1918–19. However, on 21 October, Hitler had given the *Wehrmacht* a new directive to prepare for the "following eventualities:"

1. Securing the frontiers of the German Reich and protection against surprise air attacks;
2. The liquidation of the remainder of the Czech state;
3. The occupation of Memelland."[21]

On New Year's Day 1939, Hitler addressed the Germans on the birth of "Greater Germany" and thanked the troops for making possible the realization of "a dream of many centuries." On 18 January, before 3600 recently promoted younger officers the *Führer* demanded "the unconditional belief that our Germany, our German Reich, will one day be the dominant power in Europe." Therefore, Berlin's plans for the "liquidation" of the rump Czecho-Slovak state were accelerated. In mid-March, Hitler used a power struggle between the governments in Prague and Bratislava, pushed Father Jozef Tiso, the Slovak prime minister, to declare Slovakia's independence, and menaced the Czecho-Slovak President Emil Hácha to force him to place his country under the Reich's "protection." On 16 March 1939, Hitler announced the creation of the "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia" from the Prague's Hradčany Castle, arguing, "The Bohemian–Moravian countries had belonged for a millennium to the *Lebensraum* of the German people."[22]

Prime Minister Chamberlain spoke on 17 March in Birmingham: "Is this the last attack upon a small state, or is it to be followed by others? Is this, in fact, a step in the direction of an attempt to dominate the world by force?" He would not sacrifice for peace "the liberties that we have enjoyed for hundreds of years."[23]

2 Hitler's Empire at the Peak (1939–41)

According the concept of Max Weber Hitler possessed "charismatic leadership." For Weber, the "charismatic leader" needs to be not only a "hero" but also a "prophet;" he must possess a strong "missionary" element, is driven forward by a sense of personal destiny and is almost a quasi-religious figure.[24] "The single most important precondition for the creation of Hitler's charisma was his ability to connect with the feelings, hopes and desires of millions of his fellow Germans." (Laurence Rees) Therefore, Zara Steiner

[21] Steiner (2011: 610–688), Kershaw (2000: 163), Davies (2006: 991–992).

[22] Kershaw (2000: 169–173), Mazower (2008: 53–62), Kováč (1998: 205–216).

[23] Taylor (1964: 251–253), Kennedy (1999: 423–424), Kershaw (2000: 189).

[24] Cf. Max Weber's talk to an association of liberal-leaning students in Munich on 28 January 1919, titled "Politics as a Vocation" (Politik als Beruf). Politics, he told them, is a distinct form of activity, with its own brute imperatives. It "means slow, strong drilling through hard boards," a ceaseless struggle between leaders and party elites.—"Political theory: The wheel of history," The Economist. 26 January 2019, 75.

provoked with the question about Hitler: "How could this basically banal and crude Austrian, hardly distinguishable from so many other post-war politicians, have succeeded in a politically sophisticated, highly industrialized, and culturally advanced nation?" Nevertheless, she did not hesitate in pointing out Hitler's "extraordinary talents:" "Charisma, oratory, political cunning, and the singularity of a 'vision' that reflected and enhanced the fears, anxieties, resentments, and desires of millions of Germans explain, in part, Hitler's ability to mobilize the disillusioned and disaffected in every class throughout Germany. Without Hitler, there could have been no Nazi party."[25] We should add: and neither World War II nor the "Final Solution."

After the wave of anti-Semitic savagery in Vienna, in mid-March 1938, unmatched since the Late Middle Ages, on the night of 9–10 November 1938—the so-called "Night of the Breaking Glass" (*Reichskristallnacht*), but in fact a Reich pogrom—most German and Austrian Jews experienced the unbridled frenzy of the Nazi regime. Hitler saw it as important that he not be publicly associated with this pogrom. Although many Germans, Austrians, and Sudeten Germans were shocked by this anti-Jewish terror the Nazis fined the Jews one billion *Reichsmark* for damage during the pogrom, confiscated their insurance policies, and excluded them from economic life. Other ordinances ousted Jews from universities and the professions. *SS-Gruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich established a Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Berlin, thus extending Adolf Eichmann's Vienna-tested "conveyor-belt" system of deportation throughout Greater Germany. By 14 May 1939, the number of Jews living in the *Altreich* had declined from 502,799 to 213,930 in the five years since 1934; in the *Ostmark* from 191,481 to 81,943.[26]

When Hitler turned against Poland, demanding Danzig and a corridor through the Polish "Corridor," and the Poles refused to yield over Danzig, Chamberlain drafted with his own hand an assurance to the Polish government on 30 March 1939. The British had entered into their first peacetime commitment to a country in East-Central Europe. No doubt, Foreign Minister Beck was not Beneš: "To his mind, a single step on the road of concession would inevitably lead to Munich."[27] To avoid war, Poland had only the choice of becoming Germany's vassal or a Soviet province. As soon as it became evident that Poland would not submit to Hitler's proposal, and would resist pressure from Germany militarily, Stalin saw this new situation as an opportunity to satisfy his own territorial claims without major

[25] Steiner (2011: 10–12), Wehler (2008: 675–683), Mazower (2008: 8–9), Rees (2014: 3–131), Evans (2005: 665–688), Cf. Longerich (2008).

[26] Kershaw (2000: 129–153), Bukey (2000: 144–149), Botz (1987: 185–204), Evans (2005: 378–391), Delarue (2008), Aly (2005). The Nazis racist notion of racial hygiene forced the sterilization of more than 360,000 people and the murdering of 180,000 "sick" people under the code name "T 4" (the address of the headquarters of the secret organization in Berlin was Tiergartenstraße 4. Kershaw (2000: 253–261), Wehler (2008: 653–675). When in August 1941 a courageous sermon by the Bishop of Münster, Clemens August Graf von Galen, enraged the public against the killings of "sick" people, Hitler casually agreed that they should cease; Thamer (1986: 700).

[27] Taylor (1964: 258–272), Kershaw (2000: 177–178), Rees (2014: 165–175), Höbelt (1983: 67–69).

military action. As Stalin told British Ambassador Stafford Cripps in July 1940, "the USSR had wanted to change the old equilibrium. [. . .] England and France had wanted to preserve it. Germany had also wanted to make a change to the equilibrium, and this common desire to get rid of the old equilibrium had created the basis for the rapprochement with Germany." Stalin also hoped, the Soviets could benefit from a "capitalist war"—consistently predicted by Marxist-Leninist ideology—in which Great Britain and France on the one hand and Germany on the other would destroy one another.[28]

Secretary General Stalin's speech to the Communist Party Congress on 10 March, attacking the appeasement policy of the West as an encouragement of German aggression against the Soviet Union and declaring his unwillingness to "pull the chestnuts out of the fire" for the benefit of the capitalist powers, was shown by Ribbentrop to Hitler. By mid-April 1939, the Soviet ambassador in Berlin had remarked to State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker that ideological differences should not hinder better relations. At the beginning of May, Litvinov (associated with close ties to the West) was replaced by Molotov as Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs. The German ambassador in Moscow, Count Friedrich Werner von der Schulenburg, heard around the same time that the Soviet Union was interested in a rapprochement with Germany, but it took until the end of June for the Soviet to signal favorable prospects for an economic agreement. At the beginning of August, the Soviet *Chargé d'Affaires* let Ribbentrop know that the Soviet government was seriously interested in the "improvement of mutual relations" and willing to contemplate political negotiations. Meanwhile, Hitler, Ribbentrop, and Weizsäcker had devised the basis of an agreement with the Soviet Union involving the partition of Poland and the Baltic countries.[29]

After several weeks of secret German-Soviet negotiations, Hitler reached an extraordinary understanding with Stalin over Poland and the whole Eastern Europe on 23 August 1939, "probably the greatest diplomatic coup of his career." Hitler and Stalin ordered their foreign ministers, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Viacheslav Molotov, to sign the official non-aggression pact as well as a secret protocol that divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence for both powers. Stalin got more territories from the former "Russian" land than the Western Powers had offered. The border of the new German-Soviet sphere of influence should run along the western and southern borders of Finland, Estonia and Latvia, along the Pissa, Narew, Vistula and San Rivers, partitioned the Bukovina, and run along the Prut River to the Black Sea. Stalin and his comrades forgot the admonished principles of international law, national self-determination and the free expression of the will of the people.[30]

[28] Weinberg (2010: 185), Naimark (2015).

[29] Weinberg (2010: 185), Kershaw (2000: 194–206), Taylor (1964: 307–310), Naimark (2001: 90), Cf. Naimark (2015).

[30] Weinberg (2010: 748–751), Taylor (1964: 314–320), Davies (2006: 997), Thamer (1986: 632–638), Tooze (2008: 665), Moscow News, 6 November 1939; Naimark (2015: 399–413), Musical (2001: 405–413), Service (2005: 399–403).

Although the US journalist William L. Shirer—observing the situation in Berlin on 31 August 1939—put the question: "How can a country go into a major war with a population so dead set against it?" In addition, his notice on 3 September: "Today, no excitement, no hurrahs, no cheering, no throwing flowers, no war fever, no war hysteria."—But Hitler wanted war and he was willing to "gamble," to take risks. On 29 August, Göring, still anxious for a compromise, said: "It is time to stop this *va banque*," Hitler replied: "It is the only call I ever make." Therefore, the "twenty-years truce" ended (James J. Sheehan). Most Germans accepted the Nazi propaganda that "they were caught up in a war of national defense, forced upon them by Allied machinations and Polish aggression." However, "it was imperialistic conquest, not revisionism," and Hitler had led Germany into a war against Britain and France, although—according to military "insiders"—the German army was less prepared for a major war than it had been in 1914. While senior German military officers claimed that they were fighting a war to "right the wrongs of Versailles" (General Johannes Blaskowitz), both Hitler and Stalin planned the targeted killing of tens of thousands of members of Poland's political, social and intellectual elite. Hitler had given his senior military commanders the very clear order:

> The destruction of Poland has priority. The aim is to eliminate active forces, not to reach a definite line. [. . .] Close your hearts to pity. Act brutally. Eighty million people must obtain what is their right. [. . .] The stronger man is right. The greatest harshness. [. . .] Who after all speaks today about the annihilation of the Armenians?[31]

Indeed, Himmler's *SS-Einsatzgruppen* executed "all elements [. . .] behind the fighting troops that are hostile to the Reich and the German people"—some 60,000 Polish and Jewish civilians, among them leading politicians, clergymen, teachers, lawyers, and writers. Similar crimes happened behind the lines of the Red Army when the Minister of Interior Lavrentii Beriia ordered the *NKVD* to execute large numbers of POWs—under them 25,700 Polish officers, cadet officers, policemen, gendarmes, officials, landowners, and industrials—in the near of Katyń, Kozielsk, Ostaszkov, and Starobielsk. It was Hitler, who insisted that German crimes go unpunished and that ever more violence was the answer to any Polish opposition.[32]

After the war, on 28 September 1939, Stalin offered to change the line of partition: the Western Bug River became the demarcation line in Poland (more or less the Curzon line of 1920!), Lithuania fell into the Soviet sphere; Stalin himself signed the new map. In his victory speech to the *Reichstag*, on 6 October 1939, Hitler promised stable German borders, a "resettlement of the splittered nationalities" in the East, and peace in Eastern

[31] Kershaw (2000: 207–239), Taylor (1964: 305), Mazower (2008: 64), Tooze (2008: 321), Kershaw (2015: 343–345), Naimark (2017: 76).

[32] Courtois et al. (1997: 234–235), Davies (2006: 1004–1005). Some 380,000 Poles—men, women, and children—were deported to remote locations in Siberia and Central Asia; Cf. Jolluck (2002: 10–13).

Europe. On the one hand, the *SS*-lawyer Werner Best saw the "General Government" as "the first building block" in a new continental *Großraum*;" on the other, Stalin proclaimed that the Red Army had liberated its "kindred nations," Ukraine and Belarus, and fixed the Western Bug River as the Soviet-Polish border in the future. On 31 October 1939, Molotov told the Supreme Soviet "nothing was left of this offspring of the Versailles Treaty," meaning Poland.[33]

Hitler believed he was a "unique genius," while the *Deuxième Bureau* (France's external military intelligence agency) reported that the Hitler regime would continue to hold power until the spring of 1940—then be replaced by Communism. On the contrary, Hitler gave the first order for the offensive against France on 5 November 1939, but two days later the attack was postponed because of poor weather. The German attack on France was high risk, because the French had more fighting vehicles than the Germans and a better Char B tank. But General Manstein's plan to attack (the so-called "sickle-cut") with armored units through the Ardennes Forest, crossing the Meuse River and making a dash for the Channel coast where the Somme River meets the sea, functioned because of the element of surprise and bad intelligence by the Allies in May 1940. Hitler won "as the all or nothing gambler" (Franz Halder). Only Colonel General Rundstedt's decision to halt German forces in front of Dunkirk, to preserve the tanks, saved more than 330,000 Allied, particularly British soldiers. "If the British Expeditionary Force had been lost, it is almost inconceivable that Churchill would have survived the growing pressure from those powerful forces within Britain that were ready to seek terms with Hitler." (Ian Kershaw) Nonetheless, on 14 June 1940 German troops entered Paris, and on 21 June in front of Hitler the French were forced to sign the ceasefire in Marshal Foch' railway carriage, where the armistice of 1918 had taken place. The Germans took more than 1.2 million French, Norwegians, Danish, Belgians, and Dutch as prisoners of war; therefore, General Keitel called Hitler "the greatest warlord of all time" (*Größter Feldherr aller Zeiten*). When Hitler returned to Berlin, he met to scenes of joy bordering on hysteria by hundreds of thousands.[34]

One of the images Hitler had of himself was that of empire-builder, especially after his spectacular victories in the West in the spring of 1940. In his violent fantasy of racial mastery, he believed that with his martial elite he could lord over hundreds of millions of subjects. Many of Hitler's followers spoke of a thousand-year *Reich*. "For today it's Germany that's ours, and tomorrow the whole wide world," sang the Hitler Youth. Hitler again succeeded in persuading the Germans that the responsibility for prolonging the war lay with the English "plutocrats and slaveholders." In July 1940, Göring's *Luftwaffe* started the bombing of British airfields, dockyards, and factories, known as the battle of Britain. On 24 August, German bombs fell during the day in Central London; on the following day,

[33] Musial (2001: 405–413), Service (2005: 399–403), Mazower (2008: 63–97), Rees (2014: 179–186).

[34] Kershaw (2000: 283–300), Thamer (1986: 640–648), Rees (2014: 188–203), Echternkamp (2018: 80–81). After Stalingrad, the abbreviation "Gröfaz" (Größter Feldherr aller Zeiten) became a caricature including criticism.

as retaliation, eighty British bombers struck Berlin. Now the bomber war shifted to the British cities. Between July and December 1940, approximately 23,000 British civilians had been killed by German bombs. Several thousand British and German aircraft had been shot down, more German than British; and several thousand pilots and flight personnel had been killed. Nevertheless, the *Blitz*, the air-war against Britain, failed because the *Luftwaffe* was simply not powerful enough to bomb Britain into submission; and "Preparations of a Landing Operation against England" were postponed on 17 September 1940. First came Hitler's fixation with Eastern Europe and his aim of eastwards expansion—to occupy *Lebensraum*. "Any thought of world policy is laughable," Hitler commented in October 1941, "until we are masters of the continent. [. . .] Once we are the masters of Europe then we will enjoy the dominant position in the world."[35]

However, Hitler's successes in gaining living space and inhabitants since 1933 had not been "laughable"—at least not to his opponents. When Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor, the German Reich had 470,699 sq. km with 66,044,000 inhabitants (16 June 1933). With the Saar plebiscite in January 1935, Hitler made his first acquisition. With the *Anschluss* of Austria, on 13 March 1938, the German Reich was now larger than the Wilhelmine Reich in Europe was in 1914. With the annexation of the Sudetenland after the Munich Agreement and the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, on 16 March 1939, the Greater German Reich won most of the Bohemian lands. On 23 March 1939 the Reich annexed the Memelland. After Hitler's war against Poland and the fourth division of Poland between Hitler and Stalin, the Greater German Reich annexed Danzig, West Prussia, Posen/Poznań, and East Upper Silesia, and established the General Government. After the war against the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France, the Greater German Reich annexed Eupen-Malmedy and put Luxembourg as well as Alsace-Lorraine under civil administration. Therefore, on 1 August 1940 the Greater German Reich contained about 843,544 sq. km with approximately 109,259,000 inhabitants. The largest "minorities" were the Poles, Czechs, Jews, and French. Since that time, Hitler had also dominated Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. After the war against Yugoslavia and Greece in April 1941, Hitler had put Lower Styria and Upper Carniola under the German civil administration of Styria and Carinthia (in April 1941) and established German military administrations in Serbia and some parts of Greece.[36]

In the fall of 1940, Germany forced Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia to join the Tripartite Pact between Germany, Italy and Japan. When the foreign ministers of Germany, Italy and Japan met each other in Berlin, between 25 and 27 November 1941, to renew the 1936 Anti-Comintern Pact, they were to be joined by eight new signatories: Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia,

[35] Maier (1979: 375–408), Davies (2006: 947), Kershaw (2000: 302–310), Mazower (2008: 2–3), Gilbert (1991: 667–685).

[36] Statistik des Deutschen Reiches (1940: vol. 550), Volkszählung (1939), Suppan (2017: 927–940).

and Spain. Although Ribbentrop prepared a "European manifesto," Hitler limited "European solidarity" to the anti-Bolshevik struggle and was not willing to say anything about what political arrangements should emerge on the continent in peacetime. Therefore, this manifesto could not challenge Roosevelt's and Churchill's Atlantic Charter from 9 August 1941, which pledged a postwar world that would honor the principles of self-determination, free trade, non-aggression, and freedom of the seas. The charter also made vague reference to "the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security."[37]

Already in the summer of 1940, Hitler got the notion, "which sounds really odd today" (Ian Kershaw): "We defeat London via Moscow, knock out the Soviet Union in a quick *Blitzkrieg* war, take about four or five months, by the end of the year we'll destroy the Soviet Union, Britain will then be bereft of its only potential ally in Europe, and the Americans will remain to their own hemisphere. So by another route we will have won the war." When on 31 July 1940 Grand Admiral Raeder gave a lengthy report at the Berghof on the question of an invasion of Great Britain, proposing a postponement until the following year, Hitler—surprisingly—voiced his own "skepticism" about the feasibility of such an invasion. Then he changed fronts: If an invasion were postponed, then "all the factors that let England hope for a change in the situation" must be eliminated, more concretely: "Russia" must be "smashed." Hitler's generals agreed that Stalin's massacres under his generals had weakened the Red Army, as the poor performance in the winter war 1939/40 against Finland had proved. Moreover, the commanders-in-chief of the *Wehrmacht* remembered the victory against (Soviet) Russia in World War I and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918. Therefore, Germany should remove the Russian threat before the United States could go into action.[38]

When Foreign Commissar Molotov visited Berlin, in November 1940, he demanded spheres of influence in the Balkans, the Straits, and Bulgaria in particular. Hitler and Ribbentrop wanted to talk about the British and US threats, the sharing out of the British Empire in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, and India, the access to the ice-free oceans, as well as dividing the world with Japan, Italy and Germany. Nevertheless, Molotov was interested in "petty momentary considerations," Germany's intentions towards Finland, Romania, and Bulgaria as well as to access to German industrial and military goods. Although the trade relations were deepened, the distrust between Berlin and Moscow increased. The Soviet Union protested when Hitler agreed to Marshal Antonescu's request to send a German military mission to protect the Ploieşti oilfields, which produced approximately what Germany consumed, namely six to nine million tons of crude oil per

[37] Mazower (2008 323–24), Kennedy (1999: 496). The Anti-Comintern Pact had been concluded between Germany and Japan on 23 October 1936 for cooperation between the two partners in opposing the Communist International. In additional agreements, Germany and Japan promised to do nothing in any way to assist the Soviet Union in case of an unprovoked attack or threat of attack by the Soviet Union on the other partner; Weinberg (2010: 269).

[38] Kershaw (2000: 307–308), Rees (2014: 207–210), Echternkamp (2018: 36–37).

year. Already on 18 December 1940, Hitler had issued the formal directive for "Operation Barbarossa" (*Unternehmen Barbarossa*)—the attack on the Soviet Union as a crusade against Bolshevism. Hitler as well as most of his military leaders grossly underestimated Soviet military strength and capacity. However, the planning for the forthcoming war was developed alongside racial ideas about the treatment of Jews, Bolsheviks, and Russians, and produced a remarkable outpouring of murderous—indeed genocidal—proposals. On 3 March 1941, Hitler told General Jodl in the *OKW* "the Jewish-Bolshevik intelligentsia, hitherto the oppressor of the people, must be eliminated." A week later, Hitler made the infamous statement to senior German officers that the forthcoming war against the Soviet Union would be a "war of annihilation." Therefore, the Nazis planned for thirty million Soviet citizens to die of hunger in the occupied territories. Four "task-groups" (*SS-Einsatzgruppen*) under the direction of *SS-Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich were supposed to operate behind the advancing German troops, executing pogroms against the Soviet Jews, killing Soviet political officers ("commissars"), and immediately shooting partisan fighters.[39]

"Barbarossa" was scheduled to begin in mid-May. However, when Hitler was given the news of the *coup d'état* in Belgrade, on 27 March 1941, he immediately decided to knock out both the Yugoslav army and the Yugoslav kingdom. Therefore, "Barbarossa" was postponed for five weeks. Then, in the morning of 22 June 1941, the same day Napoléon had invaded Russia in 1812, Hitler started "the most destructive and barbaric war in the history of mankind" (Ian Kershaw). The *Blitzkrieg* with 3.2 million German soldiers, 3600 tanks, 600,000 motorized vehicles, 7000 artillery pieces, 2500 aircraft, and one million horses was supposed not only to cause the Bolshevism to "collapse like a pack of cards" (Joseph Goebbels) but also to grab the riches of the Ukraine (grain, iron, coal) and the Caucasus (oil); the overall objective was "to erect a barrier against Asiatic Russia on the general line Volga–Archangel." The intoxication of the East (*Ostrausch*) worked its magic on many of those sent in to rule it. Hitler talked to his ambassador to France, Otto Abetz in September 1941:

> The Asiatics and Bolsheviks had to be driven out of Europe; the episode of 250 years of 'Asiatics' had come to an end. [. . .] Europe would itself provide all the raw materials it needed and have its own markets in the Russian area, so that we would no longer have any need of other world trade. The new Russia, as far as the Urals, would become 'our India', but one more favorably situated than that of the British. The new Greater German Reich would comprise 135 million people and rule over an additional 150 million.[40]

[39] Naimark (2015), Kershaw (2000: 331–343), Förster (1983: 413–447), Snyder (2015a: 123–141), Longerich (2008: 535–536). However, under an agreement of January 1941, the Soviets promised delivery of 2 ½ million tons of grain and one million tons of oil by May 1942, in return for German capital goods.

[40] Kershaw (2000: 360–367); Statement by Hitler to Ambassador Abetz, 16 September 1941, in Dgfp (1918: E, IV, 13, No. 327); Mazower (2008: 558), Thamer (1986: 660–667). Cf. Pohl (2008).

Neither the German military nor Germany's economic policy had forced its allies to enter the war. When Hitler started the "Operation Barbarossa," his crusade against "godless Bolshevism," the *Wehrmacht* and *Waffen-SS* were joined by Finnish, Romanian, Hungarian, Slovak, Croat, Italian, and Spanish regulars as well as volunteers from almost every European nation. The German Army crossed the Soviet borders under explicit orders to be merciless to the Bolsheviks, the Jews, and all others judged "subhumans." As the Soviets had not signed the Geneva Conventions, the Germans had an apparent excuse for mistreating and killing whomever they wished. Many in the Baltic countries and the Ukraine had awaited the Germans as saviors and liberators from the Stalinist regime, but the Nazis did not grant independence or even autonomy to any of the nations and nationalities formerly under Soviet rule.[41]

3 The Decline of Hitler's Empire (1942–44)

Stalin was shocked by "Operation Barbarossa," establishing a Supreme Command and a State Committee of Defense and taking the position of Supreme Commander. Already on 11 August 1941, General Halder saw "that we have underestimated the Russian colossus," and there was a controversy on the priorities for the *Wehrmacht*: the further advance on Moscow, which Halder and his colleagues favored, or, the destruction of Leningrad and the advance towards the Crimea and then the oil fields of the Caucasus, which Hitler wanted. Of course, Hitler in his *Führer's* headquarters in the woods of East Prussia, the Wolf's Lair (*Wolfsschanze*) near Rastenburg, decided. Five millions of prisoners-of-war fell into German hand; the USSR lost half its industrial and agricultural capacity. Stalin and Marshal Zhukov organized resistance by inspiring patriotic spirit proclaiming the conflict as a "great patriotic war." When the *Wehrmacht* approached Moscow at the beginning of December 1941, its divisions—lacking winter clothing and equipment while the temperature had dropped to minus 35 degrees Celsius (an incredible mistake by the army leadership!)—were already exhausted, and the Red Army launched a successful counter-attack. The German Army was pushed back before Moscow and the reputation of the German soldiers for invincibility was decidedly weakened. The Armaments Minister Fritz Todt informed Hitler, that "the war can no longer be won militarily," and the only way of stopping the conflict was by some form of political solution. Nevertheless, Hitler replied that he could see no way of ending the war in such a way.[42]

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on the morning of 7 December 1941, the US Congress declared war on Japan on 8 December with only a single dissenting vote, amid

[41] Service (2005: 410–419), Deák (2015: 67–80), Echternkamp (2018: 201–206).

[42] Kershaw (2000: 411–441), Klink (1983: 451–600), Mazower (2008: 4), Service (2005: 410–24), Boog et al. (1983). After the retreat from Moscow Hitler removed Field Marshal Brauchitsch as Commander-in-Chief of the German Army and appointed himself; Kershaw (2000: 511).

ferocious and wrathful outcries for a vengeful war without mercy against the treacherous "Japs." Although the strict terms of their alliance with Japan did not require it, since Japan had been the attacker, not the attacked, Hitler and Mussolini declared war on the United States on 11 December 1941. Hitler felt he was doing little more than formalizing a state of conflict that had existed unofficially for months, because US war ships were already protecting British convoys in the Atlantic and Roosevelt had made obvious his commitment to helping Churchill. The British prime minister remembered thinking: "So we had won after all [. . .]! Hitler's fate was sealed. Mussolini's fate was sealed. As for the Japanese, they would be ground to powder. [. . .] [T]here was no more doubt about the end."[43]

On 12 December 1941, Hitler addressed the *Reichsleiter* and *Gauleiter* over the consequences of Pearl Harbor and the war in the East. "With regard to the Jewish Question," Goebbels recorded, "the Führer is determined to make a clear sweep of it. He prophesied that, if they brought about another world war, they would experience their annihilation. That was no empty talk. The World War is there. The annihilation of Jewry must be the necessary consequence."—We have to recognize Hitler's central role not only in the running of the Reich as well as in Nazi rule throughout Europe but also the fact that he was—together with Stalin—the most cunning, unscrupulous and Machiavellian politician of his era. No doubt, Hitler was the main responsible for the worst genocide in history, the "Final Solution" (a Nazi term) or the "Holocaust" (Greek) or the *Shoah* (Hebrew), the mass murder of more than 5.7 million Jews.[44]

The "war of annihilation" against the Soviet Union was "the perfect cover for genocide" against the Jews. Parallel to the attack of the *Wehrmacht*, Heydrich's four *SS-Einsatzgruppen* started the mass killings behind the front lines. Although no written order from Hitler to kill the Jews has ever been found, his rhetoric set the murderous goals. Moreover, Hitler demanded, "continual reports about [. . .] the work of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the east." Nevertheless, he saw no massacres, did not go near any concentration camps and viewed no compounds starving prisoners-of-war. Timothy Snyder argues that absence of state structures, and the lack of legal status that ensued, aided the executioners. Therefore, he stresses, "Stalinist policies paved the way for Nazi extermination." Citizenship, identity, protection, the right to property and ultimately life were no longer guaranteed by any kind of legal and bureaucratic structure. While at home, thousands of Germans and Austrians, as well as Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, French, and Dutch, observed how Jews were being persecuted, abroad, German soldiers and their allies witnessed atrocities against Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Serbs, Slovenes and others. "Execution tourists" in the army took photos of massacres and sometimes sent them home. Having

[43] Kennedy (1999: 523–524).

[44] On 31 July 1941, Göring—nominally in charge of anti-Jewish policy since January 1939—signed a draft for Heydrich, written by Eichmann, to prepare "a complete solution (Gesamtlösung) of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe." Kershaw (2000: 471).

failed to vanquish the Red Army, the *SS-Einsatzgruppen*, the *Waffen-SS* and the *Wehrmacht* took the extermination of the Jews as a "retribution for partisan attacks." Over and beyond that Jews would now also take "the blame for the American–British–Soviet alliance."[45]

When Heydrich discussed various issues related to the fate of the Jews at the Wannsee Conference, in January 1942, the question of murdering by gassing was not raised. However, several different techniques of murder in extermination camps were already in development: with gas vans at Chełmno, diesel engines at Bełżec, and Zyklon B at Auschwitz. In April 1942, the first Jews from Slovakia arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau and almost 60,000 were murdered in improvised gas chambers. Already in the fall of 1941, Himmler had ordered *SS-Gruppenführer* Odilo Globocnik to implement *Aktion Reinhardt*—the systematic extermination of the Jews in Poland. From March 1942 until November 1943, more than two million Polish Jews were killed in the extermination camps of Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, and Majdanek; between April 1942 and October 1944 a million of European Jews were killed at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Only by the summer of 1942, it became clear that "Final Solution" meant absolute extermination of all the Jews under Nazi control. Sometimes, Hitler showed that he was prepared to compromise and act pragmatically—even in relation to the assassination of Heydrich, but not in relation to the Jews: all Jews should die.[46]

In his last speech to the *Reichstag* on 26 April 1942, Hitler had warned: "We Germans have everything to win in this struggle of 'to be or not to be' because losing the war would anyway be our end." As the German population began to be mistrust to the success of Hitler, in summer 1942 things were going better again: Field Marshal Rommel with the *Afrika Korps* seized Tobruk, German submarines and planes destroyed 24 of 39 ships of the Allied convoy PQ 17 in the Arctic sea, and German armies marched towards Stalingrad and the oil fields of the Caucasus. These offensives in the summer of 1942 enlarged Hitler's empire from the Arctic tip of Norway to El Alamein in western Egypt and from Pyrenees to the Mount Elbrus in the Caucasus. Hitler predicted in his Ukrainian headquarters at Vinnytsia to Albert Speer, the Reich minister of armaments:

> If in the course of the next year we manage to cover only the same distance [. . .] by the end of 1943 we will pitch our tents in Tehran, in Baghdad and on the Persian Gulf. Then the oil wells will at last be dry as far as the English are concerned.[47]

In October 1942, Hitler commanded more people (about 250 million) than the US President and had a more densely populated and more economically productive landmass than anywhere else in the world. But why should Europeans accept the leadership of National

[45] Friedländer (2007), Snyder (2015a: 214–216), Kershaw (2000: 446, 500), Friedländer (2007).

[46] Rees (2014: 250–255), Rozett and Spector (2009: 103–104), Kershaw (2000: 461–495), Snyder (2015a: 254–276), Thamer (1986: 689–710), Echternkamp (2018: 99–110). Cf. Hilberg (2003).

[47] Mazower (2008: 206), Davies (2006: 240–241).

Socialist Germany at all except under coercion? Goebbels worked hard to portray Hitler as the commander of a European crusade against communism and to win the support of the Catholic and Protestant bishops not only in Germany and Austria but also in most of the occupied or allied countries. Hitler could not run his occupation policy without the cooperation and collaboration of many European peoples. He used officers, soldiers, and policemen, industrialists and businessmen, employees and civil servants, doctors and nurses, peasants and workers, servants and guards not only from the annexed Austria and the *Sudetenland*, from the Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, in Slovakia, Poland, France, the Baltic lands, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and Italy, but also from the French, Flemish, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, Polish, Czech, Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian Muslim, Serbian, Ukrainian, Baltic, Belarusian, Russian, Italian, and Spanish peoples—more than seven million forced laborers, and further hundreds of thousands as volunteers. Until August 1944, Slovaks, Romanians, and Bulgarians followed also German orders, until January 1945 the Hungarians. Plans were made in the Reich Employment Ministry to establish a "national social order" for the continent.[48]

Since the *Anschluss* of Austria and of the *Sudetenland* and the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia Hitler, Göring, the Economics Minister Walter Funk and their economists thought about the building up of commercial and industrial domination in Central and Eastern Europe and the integration of a European economic area. Just as Germany had shown the world how to emerge from the Depression, so it would now lead "a united Europe" to prosperity and higher living standards. Slovakia accepted German "advisers" in some ministries, also Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands. Minister Schacht started to organize a *Reichsmark* bloc, including the Protectorate, Slovakia, the General Government, the Netherlands, and Belgium. The Organization Todt (*OT*), a state-run engineering group, emerged to carry out construction projects for fortifications and bridges but also for super-railways between Paris, Berlin, Warsaw and Kiev as well as from Berlin over Vienna and Belgrade to Constantinople. The *SS* presided over an astonishing growth of the concentration camp prisoners—from 21,400 in 1939 to more than 700,000 by early 1945.[49]

Himmler, also Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of Germandom (*RKFDV*), and his demographers were excited too. They counted the Germanic peoples of Europe—85 million Germans, ten million Dutchmen, five million Flemish, 300,000 Luxembourgers, seven million Swedes, four million Danish, three million Norwegians, and ten million supposed Slavs who could be "re-Germanized"—coming up with a grand total of 127 million real or potential "Germans." In their "General Plan East" (*Generalplan Ost*) Himmler

[48] Domarus (1990: 2623), Thamer (1986: 711–726), Mazower (2008: 3–7, 48, 245), Davies (2006: 293), Magocsi (2002: 51), Umbreit (2016: 210–81). A significant part of Hungarian society felt gratitude towards the Germans and towards Hitler personally, for righting the wrongs of Trianon; Romsics (2005: 546).

[49] Mazower (2008: 121–133), Müller (1988: 630–689).

and Professor Konrad Meyer planned the Germanization of the "East" with rings of German towns and villages at key railway stations and road junctions. While Poland, the Protectorate, the Baltic countries, and the Crimean Peninsula would have to be Germanized, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* designated more than 30 million people as racially undesirable and slated for expulsion: more than 80 percent of the population of Poland, 64 percent of Belarus, and 75 percent of the Ukraine.[50]

Although Hitlers's and Göring's intent was to establish a colonial empire in Eastern Europe and convert the Ukraine and European Russia into a food surplus region, Germany's imports of food from rich, industrialized France, the Netherlands, and Denmark ran at several times the level of its food seizures in the Soviet Union. Concerning the economic importance, also Belgium and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as neutral Switzerland and Sweden were more useful to the German war effort than the official allies were. Seeking to make the *Reichsmark* the "most important European currency," Berlin forced its Allies and the occupied countries to channel their trade and money flows through the German capital. The Germans combined the so-called occupation costs with forced loans. According to *OKW* calculations, by March 1944 France had paid 35.1 billion *Reichsmark* (amounting to between a quarter and a third of its national income over that period), the Netherlands 12 billion, Belgium 9.3 billion, the General Government (of Poland) 5.5 billion, and the occupied eastern territories 4.5 billion. However, energy not food was the real Achilles heel of the German war effort. As the Germans controlled only the oil fields of Romania, the conquest of the Soviet oil fields in the Caucasus became more urgent, especially from May 1942 onwards. Although the *Wehrmacht* occupied Maikop in August and Mozdok in October 1942, the whole attack failed.[51]

The National Socialist rule in more than half of Europe stood under the leitmotif of the right to hegemony, conquest, and economic exploitation of other peoples by "the chosen"—until the expulsion or even the biological destruction. Although "allied propaganda spoke of the uniform suffering of captive nations, in reality, life in Hitler's Europe was more divergent than perhaps at any time in history" (István Deák). German treatment of the Poles in the General Government was infinitely more criminal than the treatment of the Czechs in the Protectorate; Slovaks, Hungarians, Romanians, Bulgarians, and Croats were respected as Nazi Germany's (military) allies, but Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians only as "subhumans" (*Untermenschen*). The "large-scale predatory exploitation" in the conquered countries had the result that in January 1943 the caloric value of German food

[50] Mazower (2008: 204–210), Longerich (2008: 595–607), Echternkamp (2018: 95–98).

[51] Mazower (2008: 271–291), Kennedy (1999: 584–608). On 1 August 1943, 177 bomb-laden B-24 "Liberators" took off from Libyan airbases to destroy the great Romanian refinery complex at Ploieşti. Approaching the Albanian coast, the lead plane crashed; in dense cloud banks over the Balkans the five groups in the air armada lost contact with one another. The badly disrupted formations finally emerged over Ploieşti into a hell-in-the-heavens of confusion, flak, and fighters: 54 B-24 s went down, 310 fliers were killed, and another 150 parachuted into captivity. The burning oil installations slowed the production of a few months.

rations was 1980, in the Netherlands 1765, in Belgium 1320, in France 1080, but in the General Government only 855. German soldiers and policemen (including the notorious *Gestapo*) were numerous enough to rule the lands from Norway to Greece and from France to the Ukraine, but not enough to control every town, village, and forest. "As a consequence, national governments, local authorities, native populations, and diverse social classes and interest groups, as well as many individuals, were eager, for myriad reasons, to tolerate the inevitable presence of, actively collaborate with, or oppose the ruling Germans. [. . .] Much depended on where and when a person confronted the dilemma of passive accommodation, active collaboration, or resistance."[52]

Hitler's New Order showed the weakness of the nation states established by the Versailles order and how deep fault lines ran between and within them—of class, language, ideology, and religion. Germany certainly needed to coerce the populations it ruled and crushed the spirits of resistance with "murderous retaliatory instincts" in some terrifying events; but the great majority of the foreign soldiers—especially in the *Waffen-SS*[53]—did not have to be coerced into fighting. Since the fall of 1941, there had been no significant distinction between *SS* and *Wehrmacht* soldiers treating Jews, most of the Slavs, and Greeks as subhumans. "It was the war that completely altered the position of the *Führer* himself, allowing him to trample over what was left of judicial discretion inside Germany." The violence of war led "to an almost limitless escalation in the use of force and a constant revision of rule and norms." Murdering more than three million Jews in extermination camps and killing another million by the *SS-Einsatzgruppen* would not have happened without the war. Millions of Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Poles perished also in pursuit of the Nazi's destruction war. However, as a consequence of Hitler's war, more than eight million German soldiers and civilians perished too.[54]

Although Russian food output fell by two-thirds and the fate of the Soviet Union was on a knife edge in 1942, the economic system did not break down—as in 1917—and the Soviet war effort sustained itself at the most critical moment of the war. On 23 July 1942, Hitler had ordered further attacks in the direction of Stalingrad and Baku. To prevent any repetition of the kind of panic in the fall of 1941, Stalin issued Order No. 227, "Not a Step Backward," on 28 July 1942. Although in the fall of 1942 the German Sixth Army occupied most of Stalingrad, the Red Army encircled the Sixth Army as well as two Romanian armies, attempts to relieve failed, and Göring's boast to supply the army from the air turned out to be mere wishful thinking. Nevertheless, Hitler rejected all pleas to

[52] Broadberry and O'Rourke (2010: 218), Deák (2015: 1–88).

[53] No fewer than 350,000 Europeans eventually served in the ranks of the Waffen-SS: about 55,000 Dutchmen, 31,000 Latvians, 30,000 Cossacks, 25,000 Caucasians, 23,000 Flemish, 20,000 Walloons, 20,000 French, 20,000 Estonians, 20,000 Ukrainians, 17,000 Bosnian Muslims, 6000 Danes, 6000 Norwegians, 1200 Finns, and 300 Swedes as well as 54,000 ethnic Germans from Romania, 22,000 from Hungary, 21,500 from Serbia, 17,500 from Croatia, 5000 from Slovakia, and 1300 from Denmark. Mazower (2008: 455), Hilgemann (1984: 238–239).

[54] Mazower (2008: 8–12), Wehler (2008: 898–899), Echternkamp (2018: 207–211).

consider a break in the siege, and a relief attempt by the Fourth Panzer Army failed. For the German people, quite especially for many families with loved ones in the Sixth Army, Christmas 1942 was a depressing festival. After Christmas 1942, "things detoriated rapidly in terms of morale" and food supplies, told a German battalion commander. Many soldiers still believed that the *Führer* would not give up them; but Hitler had given them up—with no consideration for the soldiers and their families. The Battle of Stalingrad did not end "heroically," with a Wagnerian ending, a *Götterdämmerung*, but with the end of the Sixth Army. The German Sixth Army lost 147,000 men; 91,000 were taken captive; only 6000 POWs survived. *Time magazine* named Stalin its "Man of the Year." Stalingrad marked the psychological turning point in perceptions of Hitler's charismatic leadership. "For the first time," as Ulrich von Hassell noted, "the critical murmurings related directly to him." Nonetheless, when Goebbels proclaimed on 18 February 1943 the need for "total war" in the Berlin *Sportpalast*, the handpicked audience roared back its approval: "Führer command, we will obey."[55]

Fearing a collapse of morale on the home front as had been the case in World War I, Hitler opposed the conscription of female labor to work in the hard-pressed armaments industries until this time. Therefore, at the end of 1942, a total of 8.6 million women were employed, but only 968,000 worked in the armaments industry. Then, in an unpublished *Führer* Decree from 13 January 1943, women between 17 and 50 years of age were ordered to report for deployment in the war effort. There was little enthusiasm among those affected, and many women made use of the exemption criteria—including responsibility for children and employment in agriculture or the civil service. At this point, the tested mobilization and integration elements of the "people's community," Nazi mass staging, became ineffective as a result of the effects of allied bombing and the increasing atomization of German society. However, in August 1944, a total of 4,375,882 million "foreign workers" (*Fremdarbeiter*) were still engaged in German agriculture, mining, metal and chemical industries, building, and transport, among them 1,890,299 Soviet citizens, 1,415,276 Poles, 465,729 French, 177,679 Czechs, 174,358 Dutch, 137,643 Belgians, 128,000 Yugoslavs, and 114,898 Italians; more than 1,5 million prisoners-of-war were also used as forced laborers: 516,596 Soviet, 489,237 French, 353,428 Italian, 92,000 Yugoslav, 39,808 Belgian, and 24,978 Polish soldiers.[56]

Already in September 1939, the six main concentration camps in the Reich (Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, Mauthausen–Gusen, Flossenbürg, and Ravensbrück) had housed some 21,400 prisoners, while until the beginning of 1945 the terrorist system had metastasized into an enormous network of 27 main camps (*Hauptlager*) and more than 1000 sub-camps (*Außenlager*) containing more than two million men, women, and

[55] Kershaw (2000: 543–555), Hubatsch (1983: 196–201), Thamer (1986: 669–674), Service (2005: 424–452), Rees (2014: 267–271). According to a SD report, "The unstable Volksgenossen are inclined to see the fall of Stalingrad as the beginning of the end."; Thamer (2018: 278).

[56] Aly (2005), Herbert (1997: 379–386), Kershaw (2000: 563–568), Moll (1997: 311–313), Thamer (2018: 284), Aly (2005).

children, and more than 40,000 guards. These concentration camps—originally abbreviated as KL—were part of the system of Nazi tyranny and linked to the life in German and Austrian society, since they were generally not far from towns and villages. The driving force in the construction of the system was the *Reichsführer-SS* Himmler, whose closest collaborators were Theodor Eicke, the first inspector of the Dachau concentration camp, and Oswald Pohl, the head of the *SS* Administrative Office. The concentration camps held every possible group from German and Austria political prisoners, foreign politicians (Czechs, Poles, French, Yugoslavs, Greeks, Russians, Ukrainians, Italians), Jews, Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, "asocials," so-called "people's pests," tramps, "timber thieves," and petty criminals. The *SS*-selected "Kapos" as functional prisoners played a dubious role.[57]

In early April 1943, Hitler welcomed Mussolini at the restored baroque palace of Klessheim, near Salzburg, shoring up Mussolini's battered morale. Then followed a series of meetings with his allies at the Berghof: King Boris of Bulgaria, Marshal Antonescu of Romania, Admiral Horthy of Hungary, Prime Minister Quisling of Norway, President Tiso of Slovakia, *Poglavnik* Pavelić of Croatia, and Prime Minister Laval of France. Hitler criticized some of them because of their over-mild policy towards the Jews and he tried to leave them with the impression "that there can be no other salvation [. . .] to achieve victory with us or to die."[58]

At the beginning of July 1943, Hitler started his last offensive in Russia, "Operation Citadel." In the Kursk bulge the mightiest tank battle in history raged for over a week, with huge losses of tanks on the Soviet side, minor losses on the German side. However, when Hitler got the message from the Allied landing at Sicily, he immediately stopped the action to send troops to Italy. General Walter Warlimont understood the consequences: "Operation Citadel was more than a battle lost; it handed the Russians the initiative and we never recovered it again right up to the end of the war." Nonetheless, Hitler immediately met Mussolini at Feltre, but had to accept that a week later the Fascist Grand Council voted

[57] Wachsmann (2016). KL, counted 2.3 million inmates, including Auschwitz I. Since March 1942, Jews from Poland, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Yugoslavia, the Protectorate, and Hungary were deported to the extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, where more than one million were killed in gas chambers with Zyklon B gas; Rozett and Spector (2009: 121–123).

[58] Kershaw (2000: 581–582), Rauscher (2001: 509–511), Suppan (2019). In spite of a heated debate on the Jewish question, Hitler gave Admiral Horthy a yacht for his 75th birthday; Cf. Sakmyster (1994). Hungary's Admiral. Already on 13 October 1941, Mussolini had complained: "In Germany there exist certain phonograph records. Hitler presses them; the others play them. The first record was the one about Italy being the loyal ally, on equal footing with Germany. . . . Then came the second record, the one about victories, that Europe would be dominated by Germany. . . . The associated States will be confederate provinces of Germany. Among these the most important is Italy. . . . We have to accept these conditions because any attempt to rebel would result in our being reduced from the condition of a confederate province to the worse one of a colony. Even if they should ask for Trieste tomorrow, as part of German Lebensraum, we would have to bow our heads."; Ciano (2002: 454); cit. Cattaruzza (2017: 154–155).

against Mussolini and the Italian King released him as prime minister the next day. The 40,000 German troops, which Field Marshal Albert Kesselring had evacuated from Sicily, were strengthened. So, in the moment the OKW's Operations Staff heard the BBC' premature announcement of Italy's capitulation, on 8 September 1943, sixteen German divisions—including battle-hardened *SS* units from the eastern front—moved to the Italian mainland and took Rome. Italian troops were disarmed, over 650,000 soldiers entered German captivity. Mussolini, captured in the Abruzzi, were freed by German paratroopers, but remained a broken man in the reconstituted Fascist *Repubblica di Salò* in Northern Italy.[59]

Already in January 1943, after discussing war strategy with Churchill and the Combined Chiefs of Staff at Casablanca, President Roosevelt had announced "unconditional surrender" on their enemies. At the meeting of "the Big Three" in Tehran, between 28 November and 1 December 1943, Stalin—"better informed than Roosevelt, more realistic than Churchill" (Averell Harriman)—demanded moving the entire Polish state westward be setting the eastern Polish frontier at the "Curzon Line" (of 1920) and the western frontier at the Oder River. Churchill agreed to this shifting westward of Poland and Germany. Then Stalin insisted that Germany must be reduced to several smaller states and proposed that 50,000 German officers be "physically liquidated." Concerning the establishment of a second front, Stalin ruled out the Balkans and the Mediterranean and expressed a preference for Northern France. Roosevelt agreed, but stressed that the invasion could not begin before May 1944. When Churchill visited Stalin in October 1944, they made the notorious "percentage agreement" regarding the postwar distribution of Soviet and Western influence in Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Greece. The Yalta Conference in February 1945 was even more successful for Stalin: With the Red Army in Poland, Silesia, Slovakia, and Hungary, he got more or less free hand in East-Central Europe, agreeing only to a coalition government in Poland; for entering the war against Japan, Stalin was promised South Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands. Stalin's agreement to a United Nations Organization at the war's end was a slight gift for Roosevelt. At Potsdam, in July 1945, the last conference of the Big Three—Truman, Stalin, and Attlee—now agreed on the Allies' occupation zones in Germany and Austria as well as on "orderly and human transfers" (in fact brutal expulsions) of the Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.[60]

The inability of the *Luftwaffe* to protect German industries, railways and cities from Allied bombing, the withdrawal of all U-boats from the North Atlantic (because of the development of radar and the breaking of the German naval Enigma code), and Mussolini's removal from power by the Grand Fascist Council also hurt Hitler's charisma but did not destroy it. Goebbels exploited the Anglo-American air war on German cities to deepen the

[59] Kershaw (2000: 592–602), Cattaruzza (2017: 180). corrected the Soviet as well as some parts of the Western historiography on the battle of Kursk.

[60] Kennedy (1999: 674–685, 804–805, 842), Kershaw (2000: 577), Service (2005: 459–468), Cf. Douglas (2012). Orderly and Humane. Already at Tehran, Stalin also had demanded the city-port of Königsberg (today Kaliningrad); Roosevelt as well as Churchill agreed.

German conviction that they were defending themselves in the European "fortress," but with the war in the East, this sense of German victimhood became mixed up with German guilt. As Himmler noted on 6 October 1943 to a gathering of senior Nazis in Posen/Poznań, the National Socialist elite shared knowledge of the mass murder of millions of people. In addition, a new conviction spread in the population that this genocidal war "must never come home to Germany." For, just as the Germans gave no mercy, so they could also expect none. As Goebbels tried to make sure that no details of the Holocaust were ever reported, a sense of collusive semi-secrecy wormed into the population, resulting in a "spiral of silence."[61]

Hitler's entire existence had been consumed by the prosecution of the war. "No other war leader—not Churchill, Roosevelt, not even Stalin—was so consumed by the task of running military affairs, so unable to delegate authority. [. . .] The reins of power were entirely held in Hitler's hands." Nevertheless, Hitler sensed that he had lost the confidence of his population, and he did not even want to speak to the German people any longer. Readiness for the invasion in the West, certain to come within the next few months, was the overriding preoccupation of Hitler and his military advisers in early 1944. Only when Speer told Hitler from highly encouraging tests of a long-range rocket (later known as the V2), mainly constructed by Wernher von Braun, Hitler's enthusiasm was unbounded. Back at the Berghof for half a year, Hitler was determined to put an end to the continued "treachery" in Hungary. To avoid unnecessarily provoking resistance by the Hungarians, Admiral Horthy was to be given the opportunity to "invite" the Germans into his country, along the tried and tested methods used in Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939, even with threats against the Admiral's family. Horthy had to return to Budapest accompanied by the Security Police chief, *SS-Obergruppenführer* Ernst Kaltenbrunner, and Ribbentrop's emissary in Hungary, *SS-Standartenführer* Edmund Veesenmayer. The next day, 19 March 1944, Hungary was in German hands. It was the last of Hitler's invasions.[62]

4 The Fall of Hitler's Empire (1944/45)

When Hitler received the first news of the Allied invasion in Normandy, he seemed confident that it was now possible to smash the enemy. Nevertheless, he underestimated the massive Allied air-superiority, the disruptive actions by 13,000 American paratroopers behind the flanks of the German lines, the approaching of almost 3000 vessels, which landed around 156,000 Allied troops (mainly US Americans, British, and Canadians) on 6 June 1944, and differences among the German commanders about the proximity of panzer divisions to the coast. Therefore, only the second US landing at "Omaha Beach"

[61] Himmler (1974: 169–170), Rees (2014: 277–279), Suppan (2019: 635–651).

[62] Kershaw (2000: 622–628), Kontler (2002: 383–384).

encountered serious difficulties. By 12 June, the five Allied beachheads had been consolidated into a single front; "Operation Overlord" has become a military triumph. Hitler immediately ordered the launch of V1 rockets on London, but Field Marshals Rundstedt and Rommel told him that it was now impossible to expel the Allies from France. Exactly three years since the beginning of the "Operation Barbarossa," on 22 June 1944, the Red Army launched its new big offensive ("Operation Bagration") in the east with 2.5 million men, over 5000 tanks and 5300 planes. Thanks to fatally flawed intelligence and Hitler's order to defend the "fortified" places, the Red Army encircled three German armies and destroyed 28 divisions with 350,000 men—an even greater catastrophe than Stalingrad. Hitler blamed others, and sacked several commanding field marshals and generals. Even then, Hitler said, "I don't give up at five minutes before midnight. I give up at five minutes after midnight."[63] One of the results was that between June 1944 and May 1945 more German soldiers were killed in the war than in the period from September 1939 until May 1944.

The origins of a *coup d'état* to eliminate Hitler dated back to the Sudeten crisis of 1938. However, all prospects of opposition to Hitler had been dimmed following the astonishing chain of military successes between September 1939 and April 1941. Then, in 1942 and 1943, staff officers at Army Group Center around Colonel (later Lieutenant General) Henning von Tresckow prepared assassinations by shooting or bomb blasts—but several plans failed. In September 1943, the heavily wounded Lieutenant Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg received a new posting as chief of staff in the General War Office in Berlin and was introduced to the leading figures of the political opposition, particularly the Kreisau Circle. Under the influence of incontrovertible eyewitness reports of massacres of Ukrainian Jews by *SS* men, Stauffenberg concluded that Hitler must be removed. He deliberated with Tresckow, and they came up with the idea of recasting an operational plan, code-named "Valkyrie," already approved by Hitler, for mobilizing the reserve army within Germany in the event of serious internal unrest. When Colonel Stauffenberg was appointed chief of staff of the reserve army, on 1 July 1944, he got access to Hitler at military briefings related to the reserve army. After two visits at the Berghof and one visit at Hitler's headquarters, the Wolf's Lair in East Prussia, Stauffenberg accompanied by First Lieutenant Werner von Haeften came to the Führer's Headquarters once again, on 20 July 1944. Stauffenberg joined Hitler's briefing in the wooden barracks-hut, placed his bag with one device—there was no chance for setting the time fuse for the second device—under the heavy oak table and soon left the room. Arranging for the car, Stauffenberg and Haeften heard the explosion and escaped to the airfield, firmly convinced that no one could have survived the explosion. While eleven persons suffered seriously injuries and four of them died, Hitler and Keitel even avoided concussions. However, the conspirators in Berlin did not start "Valkyrie" before Stauffenberg's return. General Ludwig Beck, the former Chief of the General Staff, took over command in the state; Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben

[63] Kershaw (2000: 638–650), Vogel (2001: 536–550), Frieser (2007: 526–603).

became commander-in-chief of the army. However, Keitel had told General Friedrich Fromm, head of the reserve army, now under arrest, that the Führer had suffered only minor injuries. No broadcast was made by the conspirators; party and *SS*-leaders were arrested only in Paris and Vienna. Keitel informed army districts that Hitler was still alive, while Hitler gave command of the reserve army to Himmler. Goebbels who had his own hotline to the Führer's Headquarters allowed the commander of the guard battalion, Major Otto-Ernst Remer, to speak directly with Hitler. Hitler put him under his personal command and ordered him to restore calm and security in the Reich capital. Now the guard battalion surrounded the headquarters of the putschists in the Berlin Bendlerblock. The liberated Fromm held a court-martial in the name of the *Führer* and sentenced Stauffenberg, Haeften, Major General Friedrich Olbricht, and Colonel Albrecht Ritter Mertz von Qirnheim to death. They were immediately brought into the courtyard and executed by a firing squad of the guard battalion. Beck did not succeed in committing suicide and was shot. After midnight, Hitler spoke in a broadcast: "A tiny clique of ambitious, unconscionable and at the same time criminal, stupid officers has forged a plot to eliminate me and at the same time to eradicate with me the staff practically of the German armed forces' leadership." On three separate occasions, he referred to his survival as "as sign of Providence that I must continue my work, and therefore will continue it."[64]

When Hitler survived this assassination attempt, his physical presence was still enough to break the conspiracy. Mussolini visited him the same afternoon, Hitler showed him the devastation and spoke of his "wondrous salvation." However, Hitler also showed bitter resentment against the landed aristocracy: "We wiped out the class struggle on the Left, but unfortunately forgot to finish off the class struggle on the Right." Although the conspirators included field marshals, generals, members of the army's general staff, hundreds of other career and reserve officers, the mayors of large cities, and important diplomats, in the German population, for a long time, these putschists had been traitors. Therefore, the mass of the population was not excited about hearing that thousands of Hitler's important enemies—over 5000 persons—had been arrested. The President of the People's Court, Roland Freisler, who had increased the number of death sentences delivered by the Court from 102 in 1941 to 2097 in 1944, began with show-trials against Witzleben, Hoepner, Stieff, and Yorck. Hundreds were tortured, shot, or hanged in the Plötzensee Prison. Ulrich de Maizière, then a lieutenant colonel at the general staff, summarized:

> The soldiers at the front, the mass of frontline officers, initially had no sympathy for the assassination attempt at all because they had the feeling that the supreme commander was being murdered behind their backs. They did not know what the motive was [. . .] they only knew that the Führer of the Reich was meant to be murdered. For me it was a different thing

[64] Kershaw (2000: 655–684), Thamer (1986: 732–747). Cf. Steinbach et al. (2007). The list of the officers involved (to one degree or another) in the anti-Hitler conspiracy read almost like a Who's is Who of the German Army; Mitcham, Jr. (2001: 60–61).

> because I knew the perpetrators and knew their motives. And so I regretted that the attempt had not been a success, but I could not say anything like this.[65]

The failure of the conspiracy to remove Hitler took away the last opportunity of a negotiated end to the war. However, the institutional pillars of the Nazi regime—the *Wehrmacht*, the Party, ministries of state, and the *SS*-controlled security apparatus—remained intact. Hitler had lost no time in ensuring the continued loyalty of the *Gauleiter*, the Party's provincial chieftains. Bormann arranged a conference of the *Reichsleiter* and *Gauleiter* at Posen, on 3–4 August 1944, who travelled to the Wolf's Lair the next day. Hitler appointed his provincial viceroys Reich Defense Commissars. Nevertheless, when the disastrous news from all parts of his empire increased, Hitler fell ill, at the beginning of September. The hypochondriac Hitler became dependent upon Dr. Theodor Morell who prescribed him opiates, cocaine, anti-gas pills, and other medicaments.[66]

At the end of August and the beginning of September 1944, the Red Army occupied Romania and Bulgaria, and both countries rapidly switched sides. On 19 September, Finland signed an armistice with the Soviet Union, and on 15 October, Horthy informed the German envoy in Budapest that Hungary was leaving the German alliance. On 20 October 1944, the Red Army liberated Belgrade and established Tito's regime in Serbia. When American soldiers from the First US Army penetrated the *Westwall*, Hitler began to demand an Ardennes offensive. On the afternoon of 20 November, Hitler and his entourage boarded his special train bound for Berlin and left the Wolf's Lair for good. On 10 December, Hitler moved from Berlin to his new headquarters close to Bad Nauheim. Although the US troops were taken by surprise, in the early morning of 24 December German troops were exposed to relentless air attacks on Christmas, and "Operation Autumn Mist" failed. However, Hitler pulled himself together, saying, "We'll not capitulate. Never. We can go down. But we'll take a world with us."[67]

Even at the beginning of 1945, Hitler's authority remained the center of the regime. Capitulation would mean self-destruction for him, for the regime, and for the German Reich. Colonel General Heinz Guderian, Chief of the Army General Staff, had pleaded to transfer Sepp Dietrich's Sixth *SS* Panzer Army to the front in Poland, but Hitler decided for Hungary to defend the Hungarian oil fields. Nonetheless, since mid-January 1945 the Red Army occupied the western parts of Hungary and Poland. As news of the Red Army's advance spread like wildfire, East Prussia, Pomerania, Silesia, Slovakia, and Western Hungary were filled with hundreds of thousands of panic-stricken German refugees, fleeing with or without their possessions. Reports left no illusions of collapsing morale among

[65] Rees (2014: 283), Kershaw (2000: 688–693), Deák (2015: 183–186), Thamer (2018: 301).

[66] Kershaw (2000: 705–728). On 1 August 1944, the Polish underground army started its uprising in Warsaw; at the end of August, parts of the Slovak army followed with an uprising in the center of Slovakia around Banská Bystrica. Until October, SS units suppressed both uprisings; Zamoyski (1987: 364–368), Toma and Kováč (2001: 135–148).

[67] Kershaw (2000: 723–747), Thamer (2018: 305).

German troops in the battle zones of the east. Although criticism of the upper ranks of the Nazi Party and of the military leadership became more and more bitter, in a part of the population still existed an unshakeable faith in the *Führer*, who had returned to Berlin. Hitler's lingering hopes, as ever, were in a split in the alliance against him. But "the Big Three"—Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill—decided at Yalta on the Crimea: Germany would be divided and demilitarized, its industry controlled, reparations paid; war criminals would be put on trial, the Nazi Party would be abolished.[68]

Many historians raised the question why the Germans fought on so obstinately to the bitter end, long after it was obvious that victory was impossible. One answer lies in the mentality of the new young soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers coming from the Hitler Youth and being radicalized by Nazi ideology and propaganda. Another lies in the growing mixture of guilt and victimhood. Goebbels effectively portrayed the fire bombings of German cities as "Jewish terror," with the implication that the Allies, manipulated by global Jewry, were exacting revenge for German crimes. A third answer lies in the general feeling of helplessness from both the soldiers and the civilians. When Hitler heard of the atrocities committed by Red Army soldiers against German civilians in East Prussia, he spoke of "animals from the steppes of Asia," forgetting that he had invaded the Soviet Union with a war of "annihilation." Still, even those Germans who had had qualms of German atrocities earlier grew harder as the war worsened, accepting Hitler's apocalyptic alternative of victory or annihilation. Many fought for the same reason soldiers always fought, for their comrades and commanders. Moreover, not least important, men fought because they were afraid not only of being captured by the Russians, but also of being executed for desertion.[69]

Although Hitler was outraged at the numbers of German soldiers who were allowing themselves to be captured in the West, the US Strategic Bombing Survey concluded after the war:

> The mental reaction of the German people to air attack is significant. Under ruthless Nazi control, they showed surprising resistance to the terror and hardships of repeated air attack, to the destruction of their homes and belongings, and to the conditions under which they were reduced to live. Their morale, their belief in ultimate victory or satisfactory compromise, and their confidence in their leaders declined, but they continued to work efficiently as long as the physical means of production remained.[70]

[68] Kershaw (2000: 751–778). In his radio addresses on New Year Day and on 30 January 1945 Hitler held on to the promise of "final victory" and appealed to the German people to fight against the looming danger of "Asiatic Bolshevism."; Thamer (2018: 306).

[69] Sheehan (2008: 128), Echternkamp (2018: 130–134); It is doubtful, if "Hitler himself remained a Greater German nationalist to the bitter end," Mazower (2008) emphasized.

[70] US Strategic Bombing Survey. Summary Report (European War), 30 September 1945; Rees (2014: 290).

A few days after Yalta and the destruction of Dresden by British and American air raids, Hitler summoned the *Gauleiter* to the Reich Chancellery. They were shocked how Hitler's physical condition emaciated. However, the Führer spoke from "new weapons," praising the jets and new U-boats. Nevertheless, in a further demonstration of his un-changed social Darwinism he declared, if the German people should lose the war, then it would indicate that it did not possess the "internal value" that had been attributed to it, and he would have no sympathy with this people. In his decree of 19 March, headed "Destructive Measures on Reich Territory," Hitler ordered that intact installations for industrial production could not be allowed to fall into enemy hands as had happened in Upper Silesia and the Saar. Nevertheless, Speer had already hindered the implementation of Hitler's orders for the destruction of the French industry. And in recent weeks, he had arranged with Colonel General Heinrici in Upper Silesia, Field Marshal Model in the Ruhr region, and Colonel General Guderian for the entire eastern front that factories, mines railways, roads, bridges, waterworks, gasworks, power-stations, and other installations vital to the German economy should be spared destruction wherever possible. The non-implementation of the "scorched-earth" order was the first obvious sign that Hitler's authority was beginning to wane. The "Führer state" broke into individual power fiefdoms.[71]

When news came in Hitler's bunker below the garden of the Reich Chancellery about the death of President Roosevelt on 12 April 1945, the *Führer* believed the last time on a great miracle, on Providence. Moreover, Goebbels reminded him of the death of the Czarina Elisabeth and the sudden change of fortune for the Prussian King Frederick II. Nevertheless, the next day, the Red Army had taken Vienna, and on 16 April, the Soviet troops started the last attack on Berlin. So, the atmosphere in the bunker on 20 April, Hitler's 56th birthday became more funeral than celebratory. However, most of the leading figures in the Reich presented their greetings—Göring, Dönitz, Keitel, Himmler, Goebbels, Bormann, Ribbentrop, Speer, Jodl, Kaltenbrunner, and some others. During the following three nights some twenty flights were made from aerodromes in Berlin, taking most of Hitler's staff to Berchtesgaden. Moreover, Hitler ordered to burn all the papers and documents in his private safe in the bunker. "It's all lost," he said, "hopelessly lost." The *Führer* became anxious falling into the hands of his enemy to be displaced as a trophy. Speer confirmed him: It would be better to end his life as *Führer* in the Reich capital than in his "weekend house," meaning the Berghof. On early 29 April, just before the wedding ceremony with Eva Braun, Hitler dictated his last will and testament. In the brief private legacy, he disposed his possessions to the Party and his collection of paintings to a gallery in Linz. In the political legacy, he repeated—as a piece of pure self-justification—the central idea of blaming international Jewry for the death, suffering and destruction in the war. Therefore, he defended the "Final Solution." Nevertheless, he denied his absolute will to go to war in 1939. Despite all its setbacks, the six-year struggle, he went on, would one day go down in history as "the most glorious and valiant manifestation of a nation's will to

[71] Kershaw (2000: 779–786), Thamer (2018: 307–308), Echternkamp (2018: 220–227).

exist." After the expulsion of Göring and Himmler from the Party and all their offices for their negotiations with the enemy, he appointed Grand Admiral Dönitz the new head of state (as Reich President) and of the armed forces, Goebbels Reich Chancellor, Bormann Party Minister, and Field Marshal Schörner Supreme Commander of the Army. In the afternoon of 30 April, Eva Braun chewed a prussic acid capsule; Hitler shot himself in his right temple, with his 7.65 mm Walther pistol. On his orders, both corpses were immediately burnt in the garden of the Reich Chancellery.[72]

At the end, Hitler's hypertrophic self-identification led to nihilistic consequences in defeat: Because the German nation had proved to be weaker than the stronger eastern nation she would be destined to collapse. While the Allies feared Alpine redoubt (*Alpenfestung*) and "Werewolf" partisans, the Nazi regime totally collapsed within three weeks. The Allied troops occupied the Greater German Reich and forced the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* to unconditional surrender, first in Reims than in Berlin.[73]

In summary, "Hitler's regime [. . .] was—certainly for most of its twelve-year duration—no narrowly based tyranny imposing its will upon the hostile masses of the German, Austrian, and Sudeten German populations. And, until the 'running amok' (Hans Mommsen) in the last phase of war, the terror—at least within Germany—had been specifically targeted at defined racial and political enemies, not random and arbitrary ones, while the level of at least partially consensus in all reaches of society had been extensive." Once, a series of relatively cheap national triumphs had been achieved, still further numbers were prepared "to believe in the destiny of their great leader." Moreover, these triumphs "had been brought about not only with huge mass acclaim, but also with a very high level of support from almost all of the non-Nazi élite-groups—business, industry, civil service, above all the armed forces." "The rise from the depths of national degradation to the heights of national greatness seemed for so many [. . .] be a near-miracle—a work of redemption brought about by the unique genius of the *Führer*. Hitler's power was able thereby to draw on strong elements of pseudo-religious belief translated into the mysticism of national salvation and rebirth."[74]

Hitler's empire building by force subjugated Czechs, Poles, Jews, Danish, Norwegians, Dutch, Flemish, Walloons, Luxembourgers, French, Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims, Gypsies, Macedonians, Greeks, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Russians, Cossacks, Albanians, Italians, Hungarians, and Slovaks—three quarters of the European peoples. While Hitler's empire building had occurred between March 1938 and September 1943 (Italy!), the decline started with the imperial overstretch since October 1942 (at El Alamein, Stalingrad, and Mozdok!), and the total collapse began in June 1944 (with the Allied operations Overlord and Bagration!). The price paid—above all by the regime's untold numbers of victims inside and outside Germany—was beyond

[72] Kershaw (2000: 797–828), Thamer (2018: 308–313), Cf. Bihl (2000).

[73] Mazower (2008: 603).

[74] Kershaw (2000: 839–840), Taylor (1964: 27), Sheehan (2008: 140).

calculation. "Never in history has such ruination—physical and moral—been associated with the name of one man. [. . .] Hitler's name justifiably stands for all time as that of the chief instigator of the most profound collapse of civilization in modern times." Hitler left his own country in ruins—and much of Europe with it.[75]

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[75] Kershaw (2000: 840–841), Echternkamp (2018: 248–253).

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The End of the USSR

Wolfgang Mueller

Due to the vast size of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and its heavy political-military weight, its demise was an event of global historic significance. To many people, the lifespan of the first communist state as it was established in October 1917 and ended in December 1991 demarcated the duration of the "short twentieth century" (Eric Hobsbawm). Stretching over a territory of some 22 million square kilometers, almost one sixth of the global land mass and 11 of the globe's 24 time zones, with a population of about 280 million representing more than 100 ethnic groups, the USSR in the mid-1980s was commonly perceived as one of two existing superpowers. The largest country on earth wielded the largest nuclear arsenal in the world and had the largest standing army, with four to five million soldiers. The Soviet economy was the second largest in the world, at its height reaching about 60% of that of its main opponent, the United States of America (USA).

Soviet power had been established between 1917 and 1922, when paramilitary forces of the communist Bolshevik fraction seized the centers of power in Petrograd in an armed takeover during the so-called October Revolution of 1917, and then destroyed their rivals and reconquered most of the former tsarist empire in a bloody civil war and wars of conquest. The USSR was founded on 30 December 1922. A second phase of expansion was initiated in 1939–1941, when in an alliance with Nazi Germany the Soviet Union annexed Eastern Poland, parts of Finland, the Baltic states and Bessarabia.

Formally a federal state originally consisting of (by 1985:) 15 nationally denominated Soviet republics (each equipped with its own parliament, government, and cultural

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institutions), the USSR was rarely considered a federation. In fact, many Western analysts rather claimed that it was an empire. This was mainly due to its political feature of having a highly centralized one-party dictatorship in which both the legislative and federative organs were virtually powerless, being under the command of the party structures. Not only the power of this party, but also the ethnic dominance of Russian nationals within the Union and within the central party and government apparatus made it unlikely that any Soviet republic might invoke its constitutional right to secede from the Union. Ethnic Russians, making up about 50% of the population but more than 70% of the ruling party elite, lived in every Soviet republic. The Russian (later All-Union) Communist Party of Bolsheviks (from 1952: Communist Party of the Soviet Union, CPSU), whose membership comprised 5–10% of the population, was headed formally by the Central Committee, yet in reality by the general secretary and the 5–25-member Politburo (Presidium). It controlled all spheres of politics including the army, secret services and the economy and, in fact, reached deeply into the private sphere. Under Vladimir I. Ulyanov "Lenin" (1917–1924) and Iosif V. Dzhugashvili "Stalin" (1924–1953), the party ruled by means of mass terror, at least during certain periods, terror that claimed an estimated 20 million lives. In the post-Stalin era, government shifted to less violent means, mostly incentives such as the promotion of economic and social progress and the suppression of potential dissent through censorship, surveillance and focused repression. At the same time, the party apparatus and its high-ranking members, the *nomenklatura*, enjoyed significant social and economic privileges. In addition to this, the USSR was held together by communist "Marxist-Leninist" ideology, a narrative of class struggle of proletarians against the bourgeoisie and of social progress within the USSR, which was depicted as a proletarian state and an advocate of the global proletariat. At the same time, this narrative was used to insulate the USSR from non-communist ("bourgeois-capitalist") influences by the Western system being depicted as hostile ("imperialistic"), not only to the USSR, but to workers in general.

From the moment of their takeover in 1917, the Bolsheviks declared that communism would be victorious on a global scale and that the days of Western liberal democracy ("capitalism") were numbered. Yet, when they established the second ring of their "empire," they did not rely on convincing the masses of their ideology, but rather on a combination of scheming, intimidation, and force of arms. The countries of this "outer empire," consisting of Mongolia (from 1924) and Eastern Europe (from 1945/49), were also transformed into communist dictatorships and incorporated into Soviet-led international organizations such as the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or Comecon, from 1949) and the Warsaw Pact Organization (from 1955). Any significant challenge to communist rule within this area, such as the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, the Prague Spring of 1968, or the Polish Solidarity Movement of 1980, were quelled by force, usually with Soviet support. From the 1960s onwards, this group of states was increasingly made dependent economically on Soviet deliveries of oil. Later, other communist Soviet client states such as Cuba, Vietnam and others also joined the CMEA, without however being as closely bound to the Soviet Union as Eastern Europe, thus forming the third ring of the Soviet empire.

The fourth ring consisted of communist parties all over the world. Traditionally obliged to follow Soviet orders, they were organized in various types of overarching structures, such as the Communist International (1919–1943) and later, the much smaller Communist Information Bureau (1947–1956), which was limited to the CPSU and (mostly East) European communist parties. After the Yugoslav–Soviet split from 1948/49 and the Sino–Soviet rift from 1956 onwards, the unity of the communist "Camp" became weaker than it had been in the interwar period, when outside the USSR and Mongolia no communist government had existed.

Although its aspirations to world revolution and attempts at undermining and toppling foreign governments contributed to unleashing the East–West conflict in the interwar period, at that time USSR was, in a military sense, largely a regional power. This changed with Stalin's industrialization, his temporary cooperation with Hitler resulting in another expansion of the country, and then with victory in World War II, achieved in a short-lived alliance with the Western powers against Nazi Germany and its allies. It was this victory that marked the USSR's emergence as a leading great power. The imposition of communist dictatorships onto Eastern Europe after 1945, however, soon led to renewed conflict with the West. The West, in turn, gathered under US leadership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Soviet–Western Cold War was mainly fought with covert operations, propaganda, putsch attempts, arms exports, economic aid and cultural relations. At the height of its power, the USSR supported communist groups worldwide, whether in their struggle for power or their attempts to hold onto it. It competed for influence in distant countries in all continents, for military bases, as well as for victory in the arms and space race with the United States.[1]

However, when Mikhail Gorbachev was nominated and then duly approved as the CPSU secretary general in March 1985, the USSR was in a state of crisis. Economic growth was stagnating, corruption and apathy were widespread, and the ideology of the state had been discredited among broad segments of the population. The fruitless Soviet military intervention in the Afghan civil war that had been underway since 1979 was demonstrating the Soviet Union's imperial overstretch. Moreover, its economic resources were being strained by the Cold War, which had flared up again as a consequence of a new phase in the arms race. In its second ring of empire, the lacking legitimacy of communist rule and of Soviet control had been manifesting itself already since 1953 in the form of periodic unrest, uprisings, attempts at reform and their violent suppression, although by the mid-1980s, rebellion had also given way in these countries to widespread apathy. Yet the depth of the

[1]For more details on the features of the Soviet Union as an empire and for a comprehensive bibliography, cf. Mueller (2014) following the definition of empire as large, ethnically diverse and asymmetrically constructed political entitites aspiring for a special international status and treating their subjects and neighbors according to a certain hierarchy. For a theoretic approach, see Motyl (2001: 4) who defines empire "as a hierarchically organized political system with a hublike structure [...] within which a core elite and state dominate peripheral elites." For a comparative approach, see Lieven (2000).

crisis was difficult to assess, either externally or internally, and so in 1985 there were few who questioned the USSR's or the Warsaw Pact's continued existence.

The new policies introduced by Gorbachev were an attempt to overcome the crisis, which was seen as serious but by no means existential. To achieve this goal, the new leader decided to relax the Soviet Union's external relations and limit its obligations to allies and clients, thereby reducing the costs of the empire. At the same time, he decided to introduce liberalization measures in order to invigorate the economy and population. The gradual development and implementation of this "reconstruction" (*perestroika*) were to become the deepest intervention in the structures and ideological basis of the Soviet Union since its founding. Easing relations with the West succeeded in creating preconditions for the urgently needed relief from the Soviet economy's oppressive expenditures on arms. And political liberalization created room for increased political involvement on the part of the Soviet and East European peoples. However, these steps also led, on the one side, to increased opposition to reform and, on the other, to the strengthening of anti-communist and independence movements, both in Eastern Europe and in a number of the Soviet Union's republics.

In general, the end of the USSR thus involves two separate developments: the deconstruction of the Soviet system of rule, and the disintegration of the inner "empire" into its constituent parts. These two developments were closely intertwined; indeed, without the first, the second would hardly have been possible.

A large number of documents related to these events are now available in various archives. In Russia, the most important are the State Archive, the State Archive for Contemporary History (the former party archives, from 1952, of the Central Committee of the CPSU), the State Archive of the Economy, and, especially, the archives of the Gorbachev Foundation and of Alexander Yakovlev. In addition, there are numerous collections of edited documents, as for example the Politburo protocols, that provide a vivid picture of the escalation of events at this time.[2] Another important source are the writings and autobiographies of the participants, in particular Gorbachev and his advisors.[3]

Since its inception, perestroika[4] has inspired a large number of political and historical studies. This is also the case for the disintegration processes of the "outer empire"[5] as well as that of the Soviet Union itself.[6] The central figure in this process, Mikhail Gorbachev, has been the subject of several biographies.[7] However, there has been less focus on the

[2] Chernyaev et al. (2006, 2007); Gorbachev et al. (2010).

[3] For memoirs see, e.g. Matlock (1995); Gorbatschow (1995); Schachnazarov (1996); Palazchenko (1997); Grachev (1999); Chernyaev (2000); Yakovlev (2003); Jakowlew (2003).

[4] On perestroika, e.g. Dawisha (1991); Brown (2007).

[5] On the revolutions of 1989, see, e.g. Lévesque (1997); Kenney (2002); Kotkin et al. (2009); Sebestyen (2009); Tismaneanu et al. (2009); McDermott et al. (2013); Mueller et al. (2015).

[6] E.g. Dunlop (1993); Simon and Nadja (1993); Gill (1994); Dallin and Lapidus (1995); Beissinger (2002); Walker (2003); Kotkin (2008); Zubok (2017); Zubok (2021).

[7] E.g. Brown (1996); Taubman (2017).

crisis in the Soviet Union in the 1980s prior to his taking office, since research on Soviet economic history is apparently still challenging.[8] As regards economics in the perestroika period, a recent monograph has claimed that "much of our understanding . . . is based on poorly sourced media reports and untrustworthy memoirs."[9]

The following chapter does examine the crisis of the Soviet Union, as well as the attempt at reform and the subsequent disintegration process. The first section deals with the most important problems at the time of Gorbachev taking office. The second analyzes the most prominent components of his reform policies; the third traces the process of dissolution. The conclusion offers a short discussion of whether this development could have been avoided, and then briefly sketches the Soviet Union's legacy.

1 Crisis

When taking office in 1985, the serious and multifaceted crisis confronting Gorbachev and his administration affected mainly four fields of policy: foreign relations, economic and societal developments, and political issues.

1.1 Imperial Overstretch

In the area of foreign policy, the USSR had entered a serious crisis some years earlier. The most important factor was East–West tension, which from the mid-1970s had begun to build up again. The Soviet stationing since 1975 of "SS-20" *Pioner* intermediate-range nuclear missiles threatening Western Europe had contributed to triggering a new arms race and intensifying the Cold War in Europe. Although the Western alliance, in its double-track decision of December 1979, proposed a new round of disarmament talks, the subsequent negotiations failed and were later broken off. Consequently, the Soviet missile stationing was answered with Western deployments of US Pershing-II and cruise missiles. Similarly, the United States' ratification of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT-2) was discontinued after the beginning of the Soviet military intervention in the Afghan civil war. Although the US administration continued to respect the SALT-2 treaty, it moved forward with new plans for a Strategic Defense Initiative. The high level of mistrust was reflected by the Soviet espionage operation "RYaN" (*Raketno-yadernoe napadenie*, "nuclear missile attack"), which ran from 1981. The operation screened hundreds of Western institutions and measures for possible indications of an imminent Western nuclear offensive. When NATO conducted the "Able Archer" annual command exercise in November 1983, the Soviet side thus raised its alarm levels. To avoid misunderstandings,

[8] E.g. Hanson (2003); Gaidar (2007); Miller (2016).

[9] Miller (2016: 7).

the NATO leaders broke off the exercise. Incidents such as the erroneous Soviet shooting-down in September 1983 of a South Korean passenger plane, with 269 dead, combined with the rather inadequate Soviet handling of the tragic incident and a malfunction of the Soviet missile warning system, had further aggravated the situation.[10]

While the new flare-up of the Cold War carried risks of unwanted nuclear war and involved increased arms spending, the war in Afghanistan had devastating consequences for the Soviet morale and prestige. In 1979, the intervention was harshly condemned by both Western and nonaligned states in a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly with an absolute majority. In the following years, the USSR suffered a further blow after it became clear that an intervention force of nearly 115,000 soldiers of the largest nuclear superpower was incapable of quelling the resistance of Western-backed Islamic mujahedeen in a neighboring country. The Soviet offensive got stuck and the longer the war lasted, the more it looked like a clear sign of imperial overstretch. Moreover, as news of the approximately 15,000 Soviet soldiers dead and some 53,000 wounded spread in their home country, protest actions were organized, even in Moscow, albeit on a small scale.[11]

While the Afghan war stretched deep into Gorbachev's tenure as general secretary, another problem of the early 1980s had mostly disappeared from public attention in 1985 and was only to pop up again some years later—the opposition movement in Poland. Despite communist suppression, it had achieved some remarkable successes, such as the founding of *Solidarność,* the illegal anticommunist Catholic workers' union, a union that was able to attract several million members and organize powerful strikes and demonstrations. However, after the declaration of martial law in Poland, which continued from 13 December 1981 to 21 July 1983, and the arrest of thousands of opposition activists, the Soviet leadership stopped considering this a matter of much urgency.[12]

1.2 Economic and Social Crises

The economy reflected this Soviet overstretch. Not only was the communist economic system generally inflexible and inefficient. Great-power politics, the continuing Cold War with the long-lasting arms race, and upholding the Soviet "outer empire" with its manifold financial obligations contributed to a permanent overexploitation of the economic basis. Financial subsidies for Soviet clients in the global Cold War were considerable.[13] While the state-owned planned economy had achieved remarkable success in increasing the Soviet output of steel, machinery and tanks, this was largely realized at a huge cost. Soviet

[10] On the late Cold War, see e.g. Westad (2001); Njolstad (2004); Pons, Romero (2004); Nuti (2015); Blumenau et al. (2018).

[11] Braithwaite (2011); Penter, Meier (2017).

[12] On Soviet deliberations during the crisis in Poland 1980–1981, see Kramer (1999).

[13] Westad (2007).

workers were overexploited and underpaid, resource efficiency was low, and the quantity as well as quality of products was often insufficient. Productivity was low (per capita about 35% of US levels) and the production process was wasteful. For the same production quantities, the USSR used 3.7 times more steel and 2.3 times more oil than the United States. Many enterprises, historian Chris Miller has claimed, "actually destroyed wealth—producing less in useful outputs than they took in as inputs."[14] In technology, the Soviet economy had missed part of the digital revolution and was lagging behind the United States and Japan by some 15 years. While the joke went that the USSR had succeeded in building the largest microprocessor in the world, in 1980, there were only about 200,000 computers, whereas in the United States it was more than 120 times that number—about 25 million.[15] In the previous decade, the USSR had attempted at modernizing, at least in part, by importing Western technology; the sharpening of the Western embargo due to the intensified Cold War, however, made this increasingly difficult. Moreover, the militarization of the Soviet economy created a constant lack of resources in civilian production. As was made public only later, the USSR spent almost 40% of its state budget—about 20% of its GDP—on arms and related costs.[16] About 10% of the Soviet workforce was employed in the "military-industrial complex."

In addition, the 1980s saw the drying up of the earlier steady flow of Western European hard currency to the Soviet Union. From the early 1970s, Soviet exports of oil and gas to Western Europe had flooded the Soviet treasury with petro-dollars and helped defray rising state expenditures. The Arab oil boycott against the West had made the role of the USSR as a provider of energy more important. The Brezhnev administration was glad for the opportunity to use oil exports as a political tool, including making Western Europe more dependent on the Soviet Union.[17] However, when the oil crisis was overcome and the Arab states returned to the market, the Soviet economy was hit hard by the falling price of oil. In the years 1981–1986, the price of a barrel plunged from USD39.50 to USD9.75, contributing to a growing shortage of hard currency in the USSR.[18]

As a result, the annual rate of economic growth fell from an average of 6.6% through the 1960s to below 3% in the early 1980s, according to CIA and Soviet dissident estimates even below 1%.[19] It seems that the Soviet economy experienced a recession between 1979 and 1982. The country's agriculture failed to feed the Soviet population; there was a lack of butter, meat and vegetables, and the amount of imported grain rose from 2.2 million tons in 1970 to 46 million tons in 1984.[20] The grain output per capita was lower than in Turkey or

[14] Miller (2016: 77).

[15] Kotkin (2008: 63).

[16] Gorbatschow (1995: 309); Simon and Simon (1993: 191); Zubok (2007: 268, 277).

[17] Kudryashov (2006: 103).

[18] Hanson (2003: 124, 130–137, 154–158).

[19] Hanson (2003: 174); Miller (2016: 61).

[20] Taubman (2017: 212–214, 297–298).

Pakistan.[21] Insufficient growth of the economy as well as the consequences of its militarization were particularly visible in the fragmentary Soviet infrastructure and the chronic lack of consumer goods.

Outside cities, telephones were rare (in fact, there were fewer telephones per capita than in Yugoslavia); within cities, the average living space was 9 square meters per person, and for one new washing machine that was produced there were 600 waiting customers.[22] Children's clothes and certain sizes of shoes were chronically wanting. Since they had to wait so long for certain goods, some workers simply "organized" them from their working place, or came late to work or left early to try to find them. Thus, as the historian Stephen Kotkin has stated, the USSR's "highly rigid structures had to be constantly circumvented to make them function."[23]

Indeed, corruption was rampant in the USSR. With it, "lying and cheating seemed to become pandemic in Soviet society."[24] Vladimir Shlapentokh observed that "Corruption indeed demoralized the whole society and probably had a tremendous impact on the future life of the country."[25] As the social mobility of the 1960s and 70s decreased, a safety valve for public disenchantment with the system vanished. Alcohol abuse was widespread, leading to a decline in male life expectancy from 64.5 years in 1970 to 62.3 in 1980.[26] As another consequence, infant mortality was on the rise and the number of births of disabled children was ten times higher than the average.[27] Despite having far fewer automobiles, the USSR witnessed almost the same number of traffic accidents as the United States.

1.3 Political Crisis

Whilst the life expectancy of the average Soviet citizen plunged, the Soviet leaders became older. The regime of Leonid I. Brezhnev (1964–1982) had rested on the tacit agreement not to change the domestic balance of power. Since open political competition did not exist and there was no age limit for members of the highest decision-making bodies such as the Politburo and the Central Committee, as their members aged, so did the institutions, which became ever more inflexible and less willing to reform. In February 1982, only 5 of 14 Politburo members were younger than 70.[28] The increasingly infirm Brezhnev, who

[21] Nove (1994: 139).
[22] Huber (2002: 38–40).
[23] Kotkin (2008: vii).
[24] Dallin (1992: 290–291); Yurchak (2005: 7).
[25] Shlapentokh (2001: 182).
[26] Huber (2002: 29).
[27] Altrichter (2009: 20).
[28] Goryachev (2005: 97); Hildermeier (1998: table 49).

relied on heavy sedatives that sometimes incapacitated him for days, had been expected, after having suffered two major strokes and several heart attacks, to step down on the occasion of his 70th and then on his 75th birthday. When he passed away a year later, still in office, he was replaced by the more active head of the state secret service KGB, Yury V. Andropov, who upon his election at the age of 68 was hitherto the oldest elected general secretary. However, the new leader's kidneys failed soon thereafter and he died after a mere 15 months in office, most spent in the dialysis station. His successor, 73-year-old Konstantin U. Chernenko, was not of better health and expired after little more than a year in office, also without having been able to produce any positive changes.

Despite the Soviet apparatus making great efforts to cover up the feeble state of its leadership, it could hardly be concealed that the world's second superpower was rapidly turning into a gerontocracy, with leaders sometimes unable to read a few lines on a piece of paper held in their shaking hands in front of television cameras, or to get up from their chair or bed during state visits abroad. Brezhnev was often unable to work more than two hours a day.[29]

The unimpressive appearance of the leadership did not boost Soviet citizen's affection for their regime. Moreover, economic flaws, violations of human rights, the increasing devastation in the USSR of natural resources, Soviet interventions abroad, as well as the loss of young recruits in the Afghan war were further reasons for, albeit very limited, anti-regime demonstrations by concerned citizens, environmentalists, mothers of soldiers, and human-rights activists. In protest of the suppression of human rights in the USSR, no less than seventeen attempts at self-immolation on Red Square were made in 1981.[30] The constant inability of the Soviet state to provide goods of sufficient quality and quantity led to even more dissatisfaction among its citizens. Their growing disaffection with the state was expressed in the widespread Soviet saying that the USSR's citizens were living "like Adam and Eve": with no new clothing and having to share a single apple, they were nevertheless being told that they lived in "paradise." However, not only were dissidents and ordinary citizens growing increasingly frustrated with the multiple failures of the Soviet state, so were members of the elite. According to Dmitry Furman, the young and urban members of the Soviet elite believed in the official ideology "no more than dissidents."[31] KGB analysts were "ashamed" of its "half-dead leaders" and their "encroaching senility."[32] Politburo member Yegor K. Ligachev feared that the country was approaching a social and economic catastrophe; later prime minister Nikolay I. Ryzhkov described the situation as oppressive. And it was Gorbachev himself who, in 1979, agreed with his friend Eduard A. Shevardnadze that things had "gone rotten" in the USSR and "cannot go on like this."[33]

[29] Schattenberg (2017).

[30] Kotkin (2008: 46).

[31] Quoted from Zubok (1994: 162).

[32] Quoted from Kotkin (2008: 53, 235).

[33] Gorbatschow (2015: 245); Shevardnadze (1991: 26).

Historian Crane Brinton has pointed to the destabilizing effect of the loss of elite loyalty on an ailing regime.[34]

Nonetheless, when Gorbachev took office, the majority of Soviet citizens was not openly rejecting the system, nor had foreign observers come to the conclusion that the country was in the midst of an insoluble existential crisis. Party and state discipline "endured the rise of cynicism," and under the influence of propaganda and KGB surveillance and repression, most Soviet citizens demanded "firm order" and even supported the Soviet invasions in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan.[35] In fact, as historian Archie Brown has stated, "all the mechanisms of political control were firmly in place and it is highly likely that the system—and, accordingly, the Soviet state—could have survived into the twenty-first century had not radical reform, or 'revolution from above', shaken its foundations."[36]

2 Reform

Gorbachev's reforms were designed to address and solve the current problems, with their original aim being to increase productivity and inject new vitality into the Soviet *economy*. It is still unclear when exactly the new leader came to the conclusion that also Soviet *politics* needed reform, including the liberalization of the public discourse and the democratization of the political bodies. Not only are we lacking documents that would offer precise dates for certain personal decisions, it is also unlikely that he ever made a single conscious decision to jettison the system all at once. Moreover, the rigid ruling structure demanded that reforms be presented and implemented within the existing ideological and political framework. Gorbachev was at the helm of an ideologically and structurally conservative elite, a party apparatus that had been trained for almost 70 years to identify, isolate and destroy all initiatives that might destabilize or question the current ideology or distribution of power. It was a position that certainly did not allow him to openly launch policies that might have been perceived by the apparatus as threatening the system. While Gorbachev seemed anxious to position himself in a way that would enable the implementation of far-reaching reforms, there are no indications that when taking office, he regarded the Soviet system to be obsolete altogether. Archie Brown has rather concluded that Gorbachev long believed that reforming the system would ensure its preservation in a more humane version. Only later did he seem to have come to the conclusion that in order to preserve the state it was necessary to change the system. However, given the power of the conservative apparatus and the importance ideology had had for legitimizing the system, Gorbachev was careful to implement step-by-step reforms through changes of

[34] Brinton (1965).

[35] Shlapentokh (2001: 181–182).

[36] Brown (2006: 319).

personnel within the apparatus and the integration of new (mostly Western) ideological concepts into the system, not by discarding the system all at once. Before the Bolshevik monopoly of power could be done away with, a reform discourse had to be launched, reformers had to be planted in the apparatus, new institutions had to be created, new decision-making bodies had to be elected, and the constitution had to be changed. During all the phases and years of reform until 1991, Gorbachev never openly abandoned the Communist Party; on his course of reform he rather tried to take as much of the party with him as he could. When the CPSU secretary finally accepted, as a principle, party pluralism and democratic competition, he seemed confident that he and his (reformed) party would be able to win in free elections.[37]

For a long time, it seems that Gorbachev's vision was "communist in form, humanist in content."[38] Humanism and, in particular, nonviolence were meant to become the main tenets of Gorbachev's ideology with which he aimed to rejuvenate Soviet communism and thus to gain new legitimacy. "It was his search for a new self-legitimacy," as Vladislav Zubok writes, "his planetary mission to 'humanize' communism that led him to renounce violence and force—the very foundations of his power."

2.1 Economic Reforms

Initially, Gorbachev's reforms were rather modest. *Uskorenie* (speeding up), a new policy for increasing discipline and raising productivity, was launched in 1985 with the motto: "We do not need to change direction; we need to change our speed." But it soon became clear that this was insufficient to revitalize the economy and thus the more comprehensive perestroika was launched at the 27th CPSU congress in March 1986. In the same period, Gorbachev replaced no less than a quarter of the Politburo, 11 of 14 members of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, and 73 of 116 members of the Union government. By the end of 1986, 10 of 12 Politburo members, about 60% of all district party secretaries, and 44% of the Central Committee had been exchanged.[39]

Perestroika brought more autonomy for economic enterprises and a certain decentralization of planning. The aim was to stimulate efficiency and self-responsibility. Laws adopted from November 1986 through May 1988 "on Individual Labor Activity," "on State Enterprises," and "on Cooperatives" legalized individual economic activities including the forming of small private businesses ("economic cooperatives") and required state companies to introduce accounting and self-administration.[40] By 1990, private enterprises employed about five million workers and accounted for little more than 5% of the Soviet

[37] Brown (1996: 118–121, 155).

[38] Zubok (1994: 167–168).

[39] Altrichter (2002: 534, 552); Matlock (1995: 53).

[40] Miller (2016: 90–105).

GDP.[41] But the administration hesitated to break with central tenets of the Soviet economic system by initiating the privatization of land and state economic enterprises, or by liberalizing prices. While reformers increasingly criticized the low productivity in collective agriculture, privatizing the land was highly unpopular, not only within the party, but also among citizens. It was only in 1989 that a law allowed state land to be rented.[42] Other radical economic reforms were also introduced that year. Nonetheless, mass strikes were held in the Urals, Western Siberia and Eastern Ukraine as well as Far East in July–August 1989, articulating the population's impatience with the increasing lack of basic goods, disastrous living conditions, and the deepening crisis. After the decision to increase the miners' wages was made in late summer, workers focused on political demands such as the revocation of Article 6 of the Soviet constitution, enshrining the CPSU monopoly, and the right to form their own unions.[43]

At least in the intermediate term, most of the economic reforms had little success. While they succeeded in step-by-step relieving the economy from state tutelage and stimulating investment as well as short-term growth of the GDP (reaching 4% in 1986), they did not prevent a new downturn from 1987. What is more, some measures even aggravated the situation significantly. The anti-alcoholism campaign of 1985 ravaged the state revenues gained by its alcohol monopoly and taxes (although it achieved little in improving the health of Soviet citizens), producing the first budget deficit in the history of the USSR.[44] By 1989, the deficit had grown to 100 billion rubles (8.5% of GDP).[45] The USSR government rushed to print more money, which initiated a moderate rise in inflation (reaching 4.1% in 1988), this moreover fanned by the newly gained autonomy of economic enterprises regarding wages. But the Gorbachev administration hesitated to liberalize prices as well, and so the relationship between workers' income and the availability of goods worsened even more. Shops were mostly empty. One leading Soviet economist observed that in the USSR, competition did exist—however, not between the providers of goods, but between their hope-to-be customers. Moreover, net foreign borrowing rose steeply, from USD274 million (US dollars) in 1984 to USD8 billion in 1986, pushing the gross external debt to USD38.2 billion and debt service to over 23% of the convertible-currency exports of goods and services.[46]

[41] Hanson (2003: 196–197, 204–206); the figures from Cohen (2004: 481).

[42] D'Agostino (1998: 176); Altrichter (2002: 532–533).

[43] Kramer (2003: 225, 229, 231).

[44] Matlock (1995: 58).

[45] Altrichter (2002: 533); Hanson (2003: 210). Lower figures (58 billion rubles, 6% of GDP in 1990) are given ibid.: 231.

[46] Hanson (2003: 192).

2.2 Glasnost and Perestroika

One of the conclusions the Gorbachev administration seems to have drawn from the unsuccessful start of its economic reforms was that isolated economic measures were insufficient to reform the Soviet system. From mid-1986, more attention was thus paid to political reform. If the administration wanted to mobilize the creative energy of the population for the economy, more freedom to criticize the political affairs of the current system had also to be granted, as well as more opportunities for expressing personal preferences and taking responsibility.[47] An important role in the development of a more liberal information policy is usually ascribed to the Chernobyl catastrophe of 26 April 1986, when a nuclear power plant near the Ukrainian-Belorusian border exploded due to construction flaws and mistakes during a test. The disaster led to several thousand deaths, among them more than 600 fire fighters and army pilots who were sent to fight the flames and radiation. Due to insufficient information flow, it took more than 48 hours for the Soviet government to react, whereupon Soviet media presented faked images. It took many days until people both within and outside the USSR were properly informed. While 40% of the European population was affected, no warnings to foreign countries were sent following the incident and the Soviet authorities did not respond to foreign inquiries.[48] In addition to the tragic consequences for the directly affected population, the largest nuclear accident in history proved that the Soviet system was unable or unwilling to communicate openly, even in the face of deadly risks to millions of people.

From December 1986, a change in Gorbachev's information policy was discernible. Censorship was reduced and it became possible to publicize grievances. The same month, Andrey D. Sakharov, one of the fathers of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, a peace activist and Nobel laureate who had become a critic of the Soviet system, was allowed to return from his internal exile in Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod). In January 1987, the jamming of BBC broadcasts was discontinued, followed by *Voice of America* and *Deutsche Welle* in June 1988.[49] Gorbachev, who still in 1986 had warned that confronting Soviet state crimes in the past might distract attention from perestroika to other aims,[50] in February 1987 called upon the public to do exactly this.[51] Moreover, central newspapers were instructed to openly report problems.

The obvious aim of these steps was to provide the frustrated public a valve for communicating their misgivings and to offer the reformers direct information about them. But the outcome clearly exceeded these aims. As historian Helmut Altrichter has described it, "Once propagated, the openness was hardly to be limited; the critique of the

[47] Huber (2002: 98); Matlock (1995: 59).

[48] D'Agostino (1998: 110); Plokhy (2018).

[49] Matlock (1995: 106).

[50] Altrichter (2002: 544).

[51] Hildermeier (2016: 92).

present quickly extended to the past and, step by step, put into question what hitherto had been the ideological fundament of the entire system."[52] Literature that had until then been suppressed in the Soviet state was released, including George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984,* Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate,* Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, and Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem*.[53] Societies for the documentation of Soviet state crimes, such as the organization Memorial, were founded, and the first Soviet scholarly biography of Stalin was published by Dmitry Volkogonov. The *Literaturnaya gazeta, Pravda* and *Izvestiya* covered the many revelations, and new information outlets such as *Argumenty i facty* were founded. The latter became tremendously successful, with a print run of 33.5 million copies a week. The media took their new role quite seriously, providing the public with a wave of new information about the Soviet past and present.[54] Hitherto, whenever the Soviet public had learned about crimes, social or legal injustice, economic crises, the decay of cultural or natural values, or even about technical or natural catastrophes, these were mostly events in the West. Suddenly they were confronted with information and frank discussions about negative issues in their own country, such as Stalin's murderous policies, the destruction of the pre-Stalin elite, the numbers of victims of forced collectivization, the Stalin-made Holodomor famine in Soviet Ukraine and Kazakhstan, the terror and the gulag labor and prison camp system, the Hitler–Stalin Pact, the mass killing of more than 20,000 Polish prisoners at Katyn, Stalin's failures and crimes during World War II, the mass deportations of Balts, Germans, Tatars, Chechens and others, and the up to 20 million victims of Soviet Stalinism. While limited information about some of Stalin's crimes had been available to the public since Khrushchev's famous speech of 1956, the monstrosity, dimensions and ever new details of the crimes were overwhelming. In contrast to earlier phases of Soviet *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, even Lenin was not sacrosanct. The suppression of the constitutional democrats in 1917, the Red Terror of 1918 and the crimes of the Civil War were also brought into the open, as was Lenin's direct responsibility for these events.

On many occasions, Gorbachev's behavior was half-hearted or ambivalent; he often denied the facts, or failed to confirm them until a very late point in time.[55] Nevertheless, the revelations were so earth shaking that in 1988, high school exams in history had to be suspended,[56] because the USSR had become, as a saying went, "the country with the least predictable past."[57] With regard to current affairs, coverage was given to the destitute state of Soviet infrastructure such as hospitals, the pollution of the environment, the Soviet army's massacre in Georgia, and the war in Afghanistan. When the People's Congress sat

[52] Altrichter (2002: 521).
[53] Brown (2006: 324).
[54] Matlock (1995: 62).
[55] Prozumenshchikov (2015).
[56] Altrichter (2002: 546–550).
[57] Medyakov (2017: 371).

in 1989, its proceedings and discussions were covered live on Soviet television, providing the public with not only an impression of the fierce political struggles and mutual attacks of the various "fractions," but also further revelations about the Soviet present and past.

The result was devastating for the legitimacy of the Soviet ideology and state. In an opinion poll of 1990, only 22% were convinced that the October "Revolution" —the communist takeover and the birth of the Soviet state which had hitherto been praised as the greatest achievement in history—was a positive event. More than 60% felt that the CPSU was responsible for all that had gone wrong ever since.[58] Freedom of speech thus became a "mixed blessing"[59] for perestroika. While it was a necessary step in the process, it also provided a means of communication for perestroika's adversaries, who made use of it by launching attacks against reformers and reforms.[60] While liberals increasingly turned against communist state symbols, communists and nationalists blamed the Western media for what they claimed to be an anti-Soviet campaign. The public was shaken by the massive stream of revelations that seemed to discredit not only the Soviet system, but the state altogether. Squares and streets were renamed, monuments were removed, dogmas were abandoned, and words were redefined. Most importantly, the new system had been forced to search for new sources of legitimacy.

2.3 State Reform

At the January 1987 session of the Central Committee, reformers demanded a "democratization of society."[61] After the power struggle between conservatives and reformers intensified in the apparatus through 1987 and 1988, the latter were able to score a preliminary victory at the 19th CPSU conference in June 1988, which adopted principles for reforming the Soviet legislative. The Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the one-party rubberstamp parliament, was to be replaced by the Congress of the People's Deputies. Of its 2250 delegates, 1500 were to be elected in competitive, multi-candidate (albeit not multi-party) elections; the remaining 750 were to be nominated by the CPSU and mass organizations.[62]

When this Congress was elected on 26 March and 9 April 1989, several reformers, including Boris Yeltsin, Andrey Sakharov, Oleg Bogomolov and Yury Afanasev, were (nominated and) elected against the will of the party apparatus, which was still largely conservative.[63] At the first session, starting from May, the democratic reformist

[58] Altrichter (2002: 550).

[59] Brown (2006: 323).

[60] Brown (1996: 193).

[61] Matlock (1995: 64); D'Agostino (1998: 100).

[62] Lévesque (1997: 76, 79).

[63] Altrichter (2002: 540; Matlock (1995: 212).

Interregional Fraction of Deputies, with approximately 300 members, pleaded for abandoning the CPSU's constitutional monopoly of power. This was achieved with Gorbachev's backing only one year later, during the third session in March 1990, when article 6 of the Soviet constitution stipulating the "leading role" of the Communist Party in Soviet society was amended. The loyalty of the mainstream deputies to their leader seems to have tipped the balance in favor of this step. At the same time, further constitutional changes were adopted to achieve the USSR's transition to a presidential executive system. With approximately 60% of the deputies' votes, Gorbachev was elected the first president of the Union. Analysts have described his failure to push for the president being elected by the people instead of merely a parliament to have been one of his greatest tactical mistakes,[64] since it did not provide him with a strong popular mandate that would have strengthened his position significantly in the later phases of the power struggle. In the following months, the role of the state office of president (with the Latin name *prezident*, not the Russian title *predsedatel'*, i.e. chairman, as this position in the USSR and Russia had formerly been called) gradually surpassed the hitherto domination of the party leader and the Presidential Council overshadowed the preeminence of the CPSU Politburo. As a consequence of the party monopoly being removed, several reformers left the party at the following 28th CPSU congress in July 1990. Although Gorbachev was duly reelected as CPSU secretary, he came increasingly under fire from his own party, from both the liberal and the conservative wing.

The groundbreaking nature of the third session of the People's Congress cannot be overestimated. It has been stated that "By March 1990 at the latest it was no longer meaningful to describe the Soviet state as communist. The two most fundamental political characteristics of a communist system were the monopoly of power of the Communist Party and 'democratic centralism' (meaning hierarchical subordination, strict discipline and absence of open debate, with the centralism a reality and 'democratic' a misnomer). Both of these features had disappeared."[65] Thus, the "withering away" of communism as the state ideology, a process that had been initiated in the sphere of ideas and policies, had not only begun to transform the state's ideological basis, but also its structure.

2.4 The New Thinking in Foreign Policy

In foreign policy, the highest priorities were reducing the costs of the empire and lowering international tension. This would increase the maneuvering space for domestic reform and shift production capital from military hardware to investment and consumer goods. This especially concerned the two conflicts that were most costly for the USSR—the Cold War, in particular its arms race, and the Soviet involvement in the Afghan war. To underpin

[64] Brown (1996: 203).

[65] Brown (2006: 238f).

these—quite pragmatic—goals ideologically and reflecting the new emphasis being given by Gorbachev to détente, arms reduction and a more collaborative approach to global problems, a new foreign policy doctrine called the "New Thinking" was developed between 1985 and 1988. The "old thinking," Bolshevik international theory, had been built on the idea of an eternal and unescapable class struggle on a global scale, a struggle that was to end with the victory of the communist over the non-communist ("capitalist") world. It also included great-power interventionism, a "who beats whom" zero-sum game mentality, as well as enmity against the West. In contrast, the New Thinking stressed common human values and interests such as peace, human rights and well-being. In foreign policy, cooperation and development were to be given priority over the attitudes of the Cold War. Drawing on ideas hitherto unacceptable for the USSR, such as the pacifist and universalist thinking of Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein, the UN Commission for Development, and also the Italian Euro-communist Enrico Berlinguer, the New Thinking stressed global interdependence, self-determination, and a reasonable sufficiency of strictly non-offensive defense forces. These were depicted by the "New Thinkers" as thoroughly "socialist" values.[66] The New Thinking implicitly accepted that security involved mutual interests—in contrast to the former Soviet thinking that the strength of the Soviet army was the best "guarantee of peace." De facto, also given up were aspirations toward fostering and seeking the "victory of communism" on a global scale.

While it took several years for this doctrine to evolve or at least to become visible to the public (with full proof that it was meant sincerely only revealed in 1989), internally first steps toward relaxing the Cold War and reducing nuclear arms were formulated relatively quickly. As Anatoly Chernyaev recalled, in the hours after his election, Gorbachev penned the following foreign policy aims: "stop the arms race, withdraw troops from Afghanistan, change the spirit of the relationship with the USA, restore cooperation with China."[67] Results were achieved[68] at several summits with US presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, during which the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Agreement of 1987 and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) of 1991 were signed. Soviet disengagement from the Afghan war was decided upon and finally achieved in 1989.[69]

[66] Brown (1996: 221); Altrichter (2002: 584); D'Agostino (1998: 88–89).

[67] Quoted from Grachev (2008: 55).

[68] Although at around the same time, in 1986, Gorbachev approved a massive five-year investment program in biological weapons. Taubman (2017: 656).

[69] Kalinovsky (2011).

3 Dissolution

In early 1989, perestroika had reached some progress in reforming the Soviet political system without yet abandoning the communist monopoly of power. Whereas the disintegration of the USSR at that point was by no means foreseeable, it soon turned out that the outer ring of empire was about to dissolve.

3.1 The East European Revolutions

The dissolution of the USSR was preceded and most likely also inspired to some extent by the anticommunist revolutions in Eastern Europe that occurred in 1989–1990, leading to the end of the Soviet "outer empire." Conversely, this process, for its part, would have hardly been conceivable without Gorbachev's perestroika and New Thinking.

In many respects, the "Eastern bloc" mirrored Soviet flaws: a deepening economic crisis (in Poland and Hungary combined with burgeoning foreign debt and the demands of Western creditors to launch political reforms), crumbling legitimacy, and general discontent. In the GDR, solvency could only be maintained due to West German ("capitalist") aid.[70] Added to this was resentment against Soviet tutelage and armed presence.

From the moment he took office, Gorbachev undertook steps aimed at reducing the costs of upholding the "outer empire" and waging the Cold War. The late 1970s had demonstrated in many ways that maintaining the "Eastern bloc" had become too expensive. Not only had Soviet economic subsidies to the CMEA countries grown as a result of mismanagement and the oil crisis, but the emergence of the *Solidarność* ("Solidarity") labor union in Poland had also raised the political stakes. Obviously, it was Gorbachev's aim to turn the Warsaw Pact countries from dependent and unstable clients into self-sustaining allies. It is not entirely clear exactly when the Soviet leader first secretly informed East European communist leaders that the Soviet army would not intervene in their countries as it had done in 1956 and 1968. Gorbachev and his advisors have indicated that this happened already in 1985 and again in 1986,[71] although none of the hitherto available meeting protocols confirms this.[72] What is documented is that on 3 July 1986, Gorbachev made the following assertion at the Politburo with regard to Soviet–East European relations: "We cannot continue how it was. The methods that were applied against Czechoslovakia and Hungary [i.e. the Soviet invasions of 1968 and 1956. W.M.] are unacceptable."[73]

As a consequence of the radicalization of his domestic reform agenda, the Soviet leader by the end of 1988 at the latest had come to the conclusion not to interfere militarily as this

[70] Graf (2019).

[71] Cherniaev (1994: 158); Brown (1996: 249).

[72] Kramer (2003: 183).

[73] Politburo, 3 Jul. 1988. In Chernyaev et al. (2006: 53).

would not only produce major bloodshed, but also end East-West détente on which the expected success of Gorbachev's plan for reforming the USSR rested. Rather he intended to foster perestroika in Eastern Europe in order to gain foreign allies for his domestic agenda. This was not publicized but in general statements about self-determination at Communist Party events, the UN, and Council of Europe in order not to destabilize communist rule.[74] In March 1989, an internal investigation on behalf of the Soviet leadership came to the conclusion that the USSR was not legally obliged to intervene militarily to uphold communist rulers in Eastern Europe.[75] This echoed a statement Andropov had already made in 1981, namely, that the USSR did "not intend to send troops into Poland. That is the correct policy and we need to uphold it to the end. I do not know how things in Poland will develop. But even if Poland falls under the control of *Solidarność*, then this is so. [. . .] First and foremost, we need to concern ourselves with our own country and the strengthening of the USSR."[76] This also applied to East European demands for major Soviet loans, which were rejected by the Kremlin. By ruling out military intervention on behalf of illegitimate communist dictatorships and cutting back Soviet economic subsidies, the two main pillars of Soviet control over its "outer empire" were tacitly eliminated.

What is more, in several speeches given by Gorbachev, such as during the 19th party conference in June 1988 and at the United Nations General Assembly on 7 December of the same year, he professed his belief in the principle of self-determination and freedom of choice with regard to political systems in other countries.[77] While the USSR had signed many documents enshrining these principles (including the covenant of the League of Nations, the UN charter, and the Helsinki declaration of 1975), it had, in fact, often violated them. Gorbachev's new position reversed the infamous Brezhnev doctrine of 1968, which had claimed that to prevent the fall from power of a communist government, the USSR had the right to military intervention. In addition, Gorbachev encouraged the communist leaders of Eastern Europe to follow his example in implementing perestroika—encouragement that met support by only some.[78] While Gorbachev and his moderate comrades apparently believed that they would be able to maintain control without using force, this was not the case for others, who were ready to use force if necessary. To his advisors, Gorbachev repeatedly stated that a military crackdown on democratic and peaceful movements would mean the end of perestroika. While this was certainly true, in the end, the break-up of the Soviet Union was not prevented by the USSR's

[74] Kramer (2011: 788). See also Kramer (2003, 2004, 2005).

[75] E. Shevardnadze, D. Yazov and V. Kamentsev to M. Gorbachev, 25 March 1989. In Kataev Papers, Box 13, Folder 14, Hoover Institution, Stanford, Cal. Cited in Kramer (2011: 814). German translation published in Karner et al. (2014: 314).

[76] Cited from Rödder (2009: 51); Cf. Zubok (2007: 267).

[77] Brown (1996: 225).

[78] Lévesque (1997: 56, 75, 240).

non-intervention at the fall of state communism in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, the dissolution of the CMEA and the Warsaw Pact in 1991, and the Soviet withdrawal from the countries of Eastern Europe at their insistence.

Whereas the communist crisis and the emergence of opposition were the most important factors behind the momentum for the East European revolutions, the change in the Soviet attitude, in particular Gorbachev's renunciation of force, was the most important factor in making it possible for them to succeed. In Eastern Europe, communist rule had long been imposed by the Red Army and "What was imposed by Soviet arms could not long subsist without them."[79] As soon as that arms were not used to uphold the communist regimes, the regimes' chances of survival were reduced significantly. Yet, the outcome of 1989 was not inevitable. "Admirable as the protesters were, none of what they achieved would have been possible without the drastic changes in Moscow that allowed the events to occur,"[80] historian Mark Kramer has stated. "Soviet leaders could have acted at any number of points in 1988 and 1989 to reassert control in Eastern Europe and to prop up the orthodox Communist regimes, but Gorbachev, far from hindering radical change in the region, actively facilitated it."[81]

The transnational chain of events was set in motion in Poland in the spring of 1988, where the opposition organized massive strikes and demonstrations demanding the re-legalization of the *Solidarność* union under Lech Wałęsa. In earlier waves of unrest, in 1956, 1970, 1976 and 1980, the regime had reacted with a mixture of economic concessions, political pressure, and the use of force. This time, however, such solutions appeared unacceptable. Not only did the Soviet government communicate interest in peaceful reforms, but also Poland's Western lenders preferred to see political concessions rather than economic ones and withheld desperately needed foreign loans.[82] Thus, the round-table negotiations between the government, the opposition and the Catholic Church led to partially free elections on 4 June 1989. While at least certain parts of the communist establishment had counted on wrong-footing the opposition by holding quick elections and then on co-opting it into a communist-led government, both hopes turned out to have been premature. The opposition won more than 90% of the available mandates (one-third of the Sejm and 99% of the Senate). With the support of smaller parties, Poland's first non-communist government since 1947 was formed in August, under the Catholic centrist Tadeusz Mazowiecki. The state and the Communist Party were renamed and communism was abandoned.[83]

[79] Nove (1994: 142). Cf. Levesque (1997: 1); Brown (2007: 222). For an opposite opinion, see Pleshakov (2009: 6).

[80] Kramer (2011: 788).

[81] Kramer (2003: 181).

[82] Bartel (2018).

[83] On the revolutions of 1989, see, e.g. Lévesque (1997); Kenney (2002); Kotkin et al. (2009); Sebestyen (2009); Tismaneanu et al. (2009); McDermott et al. (2013); Mueller et al. (2015); Graf (2018).

In Hungary, a combination of communist reforms in 1988 and oppositional mass demonstrations in 1989 also led to round-table talks, the abolishment of the (de facto) one-party regime, and the victory of the opposition in free elections held in 1990. This pattern was also followed in East Germany, where it was propelled by the mass emigration of East Germans to the West, leading to the end of the GDR (German Democratic Republic), whose constituent parts, after free elections in March 1990, joined the Federal Republic of Germany. Czechoslovakia saw a similar progression, although the communist regime there had initially, as in East Germany, reacted quite harshly to the mass demonstrations. In Bulgaria, after mass demonstrations were suppressed, reform communists took over in November; in Romania reform communists emerged victorious from a brief yet bloody armed conflict between opponents and supporters of the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, who was the only communist leader during these revolutions to receive a death sentence. He was shot on 25 December 1989.

In contrast to earlier times, the Soviet army did not intervene and crack down on these "Velvet Revolutions." Gorbachev was willing to accept the creation of non-communist governments in the former "Eastern bloc" as long as they were willing to stay part of the Warsaw Pact. Soon after the fall of communist rule in Eastern Europe, the new governments initiated negotiations on the withdrawal of the Soviet forces in their countries. Only after events in the USSR took a violent turn did they decide to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact. The organization was dissolved on 1 July 1991, three days after it was decided to disband the CMEA.[84]

3.2 The National Movements in the Soviet Republics

As a centralized and at times repressive multinational empire consisting of dozens of ethnically denominated, but not homogeneous territories and with about 50 percent of the population consisting of ethnic Russians, the USSR was to a certain extent "a minefield of national grievances."[85] Roy Medvedev has argued that it was not the independence movements that undermined perestroika, but rather the growing economic and political crisis of the late 1980s that stimulated the striving for independence.[86] The developments in Eastern Europe in 1989 had a mobilizing and reassuring effect on the independence movements in the Western parts of the USSR, which were working in close contact with democratic groups in Poland and elsewhere.[87] *Solidarność* established close ties with

[84] Cf. Savranskaya et al. (2010); Prozumenshchikov et al. (2015); for the role of Shevardnadze see Mueller (2018).

[85] Zubok (2021: 51). On the multi-ethnic structure of Russia and the USSR, see Kappeler (1993), and Simon 1986).

[86] Medvedev (2003: 113). Cf. Carrère d'Encausse (1979).

[87] Pravda (2010: 365–366). See also Kenney (2002).

independence movements in the Baltics, Moldavia and Ukraine. Polish support for the Baltics in particular ranged from technical support for *samizdat* underground publishing to public appeals by Lech Wałęsa to Gorbachev to accept Baltic self-determination; in January 1991, the newly formed democratic East European governments protested sharply against Soviet intervention in the Baltics.[88] Back in 1989, the Lithuanian independence movement had congratulated Tadeusz Mazowiecki for being the first democratically elected prime minister of Poland to end communist dictatorship. But not only the Baltic movements were inspired by the events in Poland and Hungary in 1989. The same held also true for Soviet miners in their mass strikes of 1989 and 1991. As early as January 1989, Soviet workers in Vorkuta had founded a noncommunist trade union with the name *Solidarnost'*; after they had been suppressed, their samizdat journal was published in Lithuania with the help of Polish activists.

Besides these direct connections and spillovers between the democratic and independence movements in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, historians have identified various vectors of "indirect spillover" of the Eastern European revolution into the Soviet Union. Not only did 1989 and the return of Eastern Europe to pluralist democracy prove to many that communist dictatorship was illegitimate and undercut the communist claim that Marxism-Leninism was more progressive than Western liberal democracy. Even more important was that the events created the "widespread perception [. . .] that the moment was right to challenge the Soviet regime."[89] The "demonstration effect" of 1989 for democrats in the USSR was invoked explicitly when democrats like Boris Yeltsin pointed to the East European revolution, the peaceful demonstrations, the "round-table" negotiations, and their achievements as a model for the USSR. This demonstration effect, however, also worked among those who were there to suppress unrest. Gorbachev's unwillingness to use force in Eastern Europe not only "decreased his ability to rely on violent repression at home,"[90] but also "sowed hesitancy among commanders of army units and security forces about the possible deployment of their personnel in future crackdowns, lest they too be abandoned by Gorbachev and then subjected to relentless vilification afterward if things went awry."[91]

Like with regard to the "Eastern bloc," democratization and the renunciation of force created the necessary domestic preconditions for the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Certainly, glasnost meant more "freedom"; not only for reformers and liberals, but "also for the nationalities."[92] Under these, more democratic conditions, ethnic diversity has often lead, as postmodern immigration societies are encountering, to disintegration, since "ethnic

[88] Kramer (2003: 204–207, 211, 214–224, 224–229).
[89] Kramer (2004: 19).
[90] Kramer (2005: 91).
[91] Kramer (2004: 32).
[92] Nove (1994: 140).

identities, by commanding stronger loyalties and defining behavior across a greater range of circumstances, become more important than citizenship."[93]

The elections to the soviets of the Soviet republics in February–October 1990 had, at least at the periphery, launched a contest of ideas. Due to widespread discontent and the ideological void left by the decay of the state ideology, the ideas of those who advocated greater autonomy and independence gained in strength: "Whereas previously nothing was more important for a political leader in Estonia or Ukraine than the opinion held of him in the Central Committee building in Moscow, now the views of Estonians and Ukrainians assumed greater significance."[94] In many cases, for example in the Baltic states, "*nomenklatura* nationalism"[95]—the championing of autonomy, national rights and independence by members of the local communist elite—became the main new source of legitimacy.

In general, the later a territory had been incorporated into the USSR, the stronger its national traditions of statehood, and the higher its average level of education, the more its population was ready to fight for reforms, including autonomy and, then, independence.[96] Thus, the Balts were the spearheads in the struggle. In August 1987, demonstrations in Vilnius and Riga against the Hitler–Stalin Pact of 1939 resulted in 86 arrests and a Soviet press campaign accusing the West of having orchestrated the event.[97] In the following months, the so-called People's Fronts for the Support of Perestroika were founded in the Baltics. They demanded the publication of accurate historical facts about the Pact, the acceptance of their national languages, human rights, free elections, and the restoration of independence. In the fall of 1988, the—still communist—national soviets of the Baltic republics declared their national tongues as the official state languages, and passed pronouncements against the ongoing "Russification" of the republics, which was being undertaken through the state-sponsored settlement of ethnic Russians in the Baltics. In the following months, the three Baltic parliaments declared—in line with the existing USSR constitution—their sovereignty within the USSR. After the so-called Baltic Chain—a mass demonstration of 1–2 million people stretching over 600 kilometers through all three republics that took place on 23 August 1989, the 50th anniversary of the Hitler–Stalin Pact—a quantum leap was achieved when the Lithuanian parliament declared the Soviet annexation of Lithuania in 1940 illegal. After the elections of 1990 brought victories of the Baltic People's Fronts, they announced that independence referendums would be held. Although the Union government imposed an economic blockade, Soviet police occupied the People's Front party headquarters in Vilnius, and the Soviet army started maneuvers at

[93] McNeill (1994: 12–13).
[94] Brown (2006: 330).
[95] Brown (1996: 259).
[96] Hildermeier (2016: 95).
[97] Altrichter (2002: 563).

the Baltic borders, Boris Yeltsin, who was elected president of the Russian parliament in May 1990, supported the Baltic struggle for independence.[98]

In the meantime, in February–April 1989, hundreds of thousands of Georgians had protested the forced annexation of their country to the USSR and demanded autonomy. A massacre committed by Soviet special forces in Tbilisi on 9 April left at least 19 dead and 200 wounded. As a result, the protester's demands shifted from autonomy to independence.[99] In Moldova, demonstrations in November 1989 and November 1990 resulted in violent clashes between demonstrators and armed forces.

In some parts of the USSR, the dissolution process heated up hitherto frozen ethnic conflicts. An example of this was Nagorny Karabakh, a district under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan whose population, however, was about 80% Armenian. When in February 1988 Armenians demonstrated for transferring the region to Armenia, groups of Azeri organized a pogrom and dozens of Armenians were killed in the city of Sumgait. Reformist CPSU Politburo member Alexander Yakovlev later claimed that the unrest had been stirred up by the Soviet secret services[100]—presumably with the aim of creating a pretext for having the army intervene. Armenians reacted by chasing Azeri from Armenia. In January 1990, new Azeri pogroms in Baku took the lives of more than 90 Armenians and prompted the Kremlin to send the Soviet army into the city, costing another 200 lives. The next months also saw unrest in Tajikistan, with more than 22 lives lost, and in June 1990, Uzbek–Kyrgyz conflicts that claimed over 200.

In January 1991, events escalated at the periphery after special police forces were dispatched by the center to the Baltics, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia.[101] In a speech to the Supreme Soviet, Gorbachev threatened that military intervention might be possible to ensure the "constitutional order". It is debated what exactly Gorbachev's role was in the Soviet armed intervention being launched in Lithuania and Latvia, culminating in Soviet attacks on strategic points, including the Lithuanian television center in Vilnius on "Bloody Sunday," 13 January 1991, and the Latvian "Barricades" and ministry of interior building in Riga on 20 January. These events left, respectively, 15 and 4 civilians dead, as well as 2 Latvian policemen and 1 Soviet soldier. More than 700 civilians were wounded. KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov later claimed that it had been agreed in Gorbachev's cabinet that force would be applied.[102] Anatoly Chernyaev, Gorbachev's right hand, who did not agree to the intervention, asserted that it ruined the leader's reputation.[103] Not only did the Polish, Norwegian and other Western governments protest the application of force and demand an immediate Soviet withdrawal from Lithuania, so

[98] Huber (2002: 155–157); Altrichter (2002: 572).

[99] Altrichter (2002: 568); Matlock (1995: 239).

[100] Yakovlev (2003: 563).

[101] Matlock (1995: 652); D'Agostino (1998: 290).

[102] Kryuchkov (1996: II, 31).

[103] Chernyaev (2008: 900f); Chernyaev (2011: 13 Jan. 1991).

did several thousand Russian demonstrators. Boris Yeltsin even called upon Russian soldiers not to partake in military actions in Lithuania and signed treaties of mutual assistance with all three Baltic states.[104]

The tendency toward separating from the Union was propelled by looming cultural issues as well as the deepening economic crisis. In the Ukrainian independence and human rights movement, demands for autonomy and official acknowledgement of the Ukrainian language as well as the Uniate Church were launched. Neighboring Moldova demanded the return to the Latin alphabet. And the declaration of sovereignty of Ukraine in June 1990 transpired amidst widespread mass strikes of miners protesting economic decline as a response to inflation, delays in receiving their wages, and shortages of goods. Since public employees were increasingly paid wages in coupons, the circulation of the ruble had de facto become restricted.

3.3 Economic Crisis and De-legitimization Again

The year of 1990 saw a marked deterioration of the Soviet economy, a deterioration that significantly reduced Gorbachev's maneuvering space and popularity. A special report by the International Monetary Fund that had been commissioned to assess the outlook for foreign investment in the USSR had come to the conclusion that the national economy was in a systemic vacuum. The old system had broken down, a new was not in place. Revenues from enterprises fell to 11.7% of the GDP, a bad harvest in 1991 delivered only 30% of the projected amount. As a consequence, the Soviet GNP fell in 1990–1991 by 17.1%, the budget deficit reached 30% of the GDP in 1991, the internal state debt rose from 20.3% of the GDP 1986 to 56.6% in 1990 and foreign debt rose from about USD60 (1990) million to over USD80 (1991) million. Since 1985, the Soviet terms for borrowing money on the international markets significantly deteriorated and in July 1990, Gorbachev requested financial assistance from the Group of Seven (G-7).[105]

From 1989, a state commission headed by economists Leonid Abalkin, Abel Aganbegyan, Stanislav Shatalin had developed reform plans with the aim of putting the Soviet economy on a sound footing. The commission's reform program of 1990 included spending cuts; the cancelling of subsidies; privatization of some state enterprises; preparations for privatization of state and collective farms and, finally, the transition to a market economy within 500 days. Historian Chris Miller has argued that the Soviet budget crisis was far from being insoluble. Yet it turned out that cutting defense, industrial and agricultural subsidies was resisted by the Soviet apparatus, while increasing prices was seen as politically risky. In fact, prices for milk or meat were subsidized by 50–72%.[106]

[104] Altrichter (2002: 573).

[105] Hanson (2003: 220, 229, 231–232, 236); Miller (2016: 145–147, 152, 155–157).

[106] Miller (2016: 4, 66); Hanson (2003: 226).

Therefore, the administration opted for printing money to cure the Soviet economy by stimulating growth.

In the meantime, excess consumer purchasing power lead in 1991 to a "ferocious shortage of everything."[107] Despite local food rationing having been introduced since 1989, only 12% of respondents saw meat and sausages in 1991; only 11% could convert their coupons into the respective goods.

While the East European revolutions had shaken Gorbachev's backing within the party and the army, the deepening economic crisis sent his popularity among the general population downward. In 1990, nearly five out of 19 million CPSU members left the party; millions more silently ceased to pay the fees.[108] On may occasions, Party gatherings were torn between anti-reform "dogmatism," "nihilism" and frustration.[109] At the Central Committee Plenum in April 1991, the leader was confronted with verbal assaults by army generals.[110] Indeed, anger and frustration with perestroika as well as the withdrawal first from East Germany and then from East Central Europe had led to increasing dissatisfaction with Gorbachev already over the two preceding years. This was particularly the case in the army and the secret services.[111] In the spring of 1991, not only almost 50% of the CPSU provincial secretaries but also widespread mass strikes of workers demanded Gorbachev's resignation. And among the general population, the leader's popularity was overshadowed by Yeltsin, his reformist rival, already since 1990 when Gorbachev's approval ratings plunged from 45–50% to less than 20.[112]

3.4 The New Union Treaty, the Putsch and the End

In 1990, the Supreme Soviet adopted a law stipulating that Soviet republics were allowed to leave the Union after a referendum with at least two-thirds majority favoring independence and after a five-year period for regulating the exit.[113] By the end of 1990, all of the Soviet republics had declared their sovereignty. Some of them envisaged this as a step toward full independence, to be declared as soon as a referendum had been held. Others, such as Kazakhstan, rather followed the example of the Russian Federation, where sovereignty was declared on 12 June 1990, soon after the Russian parliamentary elections. Still earlier, Russian law had already been given precedence over the law of the Union. Indeed, the role of the largest Soviet republic under Boris Yeltsin in dissolving the USSR cannot be

[107] Hanson (2003: 234 (quote), 237).
[108] Kramer (2004: 13).
[109] Jakowlew (2003: 540).
[110] Taubman (2017: 685).
[111] Odom (1998); Taylor (2003).
[112] Kramer (2004: 16). Cf. Zubok (2021: 115; 283).
[113] Medvedev (2003: 113).

overestimated.[114] Yeltsin became not only the spearhead of the radical reformers, but also ready, in his struggle for power and against Gorbachev, to abandon the Union.

Whereas the centrifugal actions of the smaller republics were seen by Moscow to be a nuisance but not an existential threat, the Russian striving toward more independence forced Gorbachev to change his strategy. On 24 November 1990, the Soviet leader presented the draft of a new Union Treaty. While defense, state security, foreign policy, foreign trade, the currency, as well as space flight were to remain the prerogatives of the Union, other competencies, such as economic affairs, were to be transferred to the republics.

Outside the Baltics and other hotspots of the independence movements, the overall mood of the population was still loyal to the Union. The Union-wide referendum held on Gorbachev's initiative on 17 March 1991 regarding the "preservation of the USSR as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which the rights and freedom of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed" was supported by more than 77% of the voters. Turnout was about 80%—despite the referendum being boycotted by the governments of the Baltic states, Moldova (with exceptions in Transnistria and Gagauzia), Georgia (where the referendum was only held in Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and Armenia. In Russia and Ukraine, the referendum's question was rejected by approximately 28% of the voters. In Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the question was linked to the establishment of sovereignty and was approved by the majority. In contrast, in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia separate referendums on the restoration of independence were held on 9 February and 3 March, these passing with massive majorities—from 95 to 99% of the vote.[115]

In April, negotiations on Gorbachev's draft of a revised Union Treaty started between the remaining nine soviet republics and the Kremlin at the state dacha of Novo Ogoryovo near Moscow.[116] The Baltic states, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia did not participate. Yeltsin, who was elected president of the Russian Federal Republic on 12 June 1991, and Leonid Kravchuk, the leader of Ukraine, proposed changing the name of the USSR to Union of Sovereign States. After Gorbachev had agreed to grant the republics full economic self-determination, Yeltsin consented to signing the new treaty, on the condition, however, that several communist hardliners be removed from the Union government, including KGB head Vladimir Kryuchkov, Union prime minister Valentin Pavlov, and Minister of the Interior Boris Pugo.[117]

[114] Huber (2002: 164); Brown (2006: 347).

[115] Database and Search Engine for Direct Democracy, "Sowjetunion, 17. März 1991: Weiterbestand der UdSSR als Föderation gleichberechtigter und souveräner Staaten,"https://www.sudd.ch/event.php?lang=en&id=su011991 (2019); Data from *Archiv der Gegenwart* 1991: 35440.B2; 1996: 40885A.

[116] Brown (1996: 286).

[117] Altrichter (2002: 574); Matlock (1995: 578).

On 18 August these three, together with USSR vice-president Gennady Yanaev, staged a coup, possibly precipitated by their impending removal as well as their increasing opposition to perestroika. Gorbachev, who was on vacation with his family at the Black Sea coast, was placed under house arrest and a "State Committee for the State of Emergency" took over power. Perhaps its gravest mistake was not arresting Yeltsin, the Russian president, who organized resistance against it. Taking command of the army and the KGB on the territory of Russia, he condemned the coup and appealed to all armed forces that had been sent to occupy the center of Moscow around the Russian parliament building to lay down their weapons. After several army units followed Yeltsin's call to abandon the Committee, about 50,000 Muscovites and several thousand workers in the industrial regions of the USSR participated in demonstrations against the coup. The Committee surrendered on 21 August, at which point Pugo and former Chief of the General Staff, Marshall Sergey Akhromeev, committed suicide.[118]

Despite its failure, the coup ultimately weakened Gorbachev's position in the internal balance of power significantly. From then on, Yeltsin was clearly in the stronger position. Since the coup had emerged from the CPSU, the Russian president banned any further activities of the party on Russian soil. The party's headquarters were sealed, its property was sequestrated by the Russian government, and Gorbachev, who had been bypassed by the coup, was forced to resign from his post as CPSU general secretary.[119] Moreover, key players of the USSR government were either placed under arrest or relieved from their duties. Others were already dead. That Gorbachev failed to grasp the complicity of the party and spoke after the coup of "reforming" the CPSU was interpreted by many as sign of his losing touch with reality.

With Yeltsin achieving the upper hand in his power struggle with Gorbachev, the drive for independence was also strengthened. For the Russian president, abandoning the Union not only meant liberating his country from communism and the burdens of sustaining the multinational "empire," it also meant getting rid of the only institution that was preventing Russian sovereignty. Thus, Russia under Yeltsin became a supporter of independence, with Yeltsin recognizing the Baltic countries' independence already in August. The USSR followed on 6 September.

There is a broad consensus that the coup accelerated the dissolution of the Union.[120] On the one hand, republics that had already moved toward independence were suddenly reminded of the risk of perestroika being ended by a new Union government, be it rightwing or leftwing, a government that might resort to violent means to hinder their aspirations. Thus, the coup strengthened their resolution to achieve independence. In September, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia issued declarations to this effect. On the other hand, the governments of Soviet republics that had hitherto not decided to leave

[118] On the coup attempt, see Knight (2003); Lozo (2014).

[119] Huber (2002: 248–249).

[120] Brown (1996: 303).

the Union and had reacted to the coup with adaptation or even support, such as the leaders of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, feared that their position might be endangered after the coup's failure. This is why they, too, declared independence. As a result, all of the original republics save two, Russia and Kazakhstan, declared independence by October 1991. Then on 12 December the Russian Parliament voted to nullify the December 1922 Treaty of the Union. It was only after this that Kazakhstan declared its independence, on 16 December.

The images of Soviet tanks rolling through Vilnius to quell Baltic independence and, later, through Moscow to quell perestroika finally convinced the Western world to recognize the independence of the former Soviet republics. Hitherto most Western governments had hesitated to do so, since they feared it might undermine Gorbachev's authority in his country and threaten the survival of perestroika. Moreover, the German government did not want to risk any problems with the Soviets agreeing to German reunification. Some Western governments and economic lobbies reacted to the coup in an appeasing manner. However, on 24 August the states of the European Community recognized Baltic independence.[121] The United States had upheld the principle of the Baltic republics' sovereignty despite their having been annexed by the USSR in 1940.

Meanwhile, in September the Soviet People's Congress moved toward founding the Union of Sovereign States,[122] and in October, the leaders of the republics, with the exception of the Baltic states, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan, signed a treaty establishing a common economic space. The next month, the leaders of the republics confirmed their intention to create a Union of Sovereign States, with a common president, army and court of justice.

In the end, events in two republics prevented this from happening. First, the Russian Federation moved more decisively toward full independence. Its goal was to create a confederative structure or commonwealth without a central authority, thus sidelining Gorbachev and ruling out any future central authority of the Union. In November, Yeltsin, who apparently had hitherto toyed with the idea of aiming at becoming president of the Union, rejected the current draft of the new Union treaty and demanded a confederate structure instead.[123] In his conversations with Gorbachev, the Russian president pointed to developments in Ukraine.[124] A month earlier, Yeltsin had announced a policy of radical economic reform and, amidst the deepening economic crisis, stopped financial transfers to the Union with the exception of the Union ministries.[125] The USSR lost 100 billion rubles, because the Russian Federation (RSFSR) declined to transfer the tax revenues in 1991; from all republics, the Union received 40% less money than projected.[126] As funds in the

[121] Huber (2002: 261). Cf. Spohr Readman (2004).
[122] Matlock (1995: 619).
[123] Matlock (1995: 627).
[124] Zubok (2021: 386).
[125] Huber (2002:276).
[126] Miller (2016: 160).

Central Bank of the USSR quickly dried up, the RSFSR took over payments of wages for public employees.

The second important development was the idea of independence becoming stronger in Ukraine. In the second largest republic of the Union, the public mood shifted decisively after the attempted Moscow coup. Whereas in March about 70% of Ukrainians had voted in favor of a reformed Union, in a referendum on 1 December more than 92% supported Ukrainian independence instead. Independence was recognized by the Russian Federation 2 days later, and the same week, Gorbachev's Union Treaty was rejected by the Ukrainian parliament, as well as by Leonid Kravchuk, who had been elected Ukrainian president by popular vote on 1 December.

At a meeting on 8 December in Belavezhskaya pushcha, Belarus, the presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus—Yeltsin, Kravchuk and Stanislau Shushkevich—declared the Union to have failed. They unveiled their goal to create a Commonwealth of Independent States, open for all former Soviet republics. The Commonwealth was launched at a conference in Alma-Ata (Almaty), Kazakhstan, on 21 December. It included all of the former Soviet republics except the Baltic states and Georgia. On 26 December, the second chamber of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Council of Nationalities, declared that the USSR no longer existed and moved to recognize the independence of its constituent republics.

A few days earlier, on 18 December, Gorbachev had announced his decision to step down as president of the USSR, doing so on 25 December. After the Kremlin and the keys to the nuclear military systems had been handed over to Boris Yeltsin, the Soviet flag was removed from the Kremlin and replaced by the Russian one.[127]

4 Conclusion

"The most perilous moment for a bad government is one when it seeks to mend its ways," as has been famously stated by Alexis de Tocqueville.[128] Indeed, the reform process that was launched by Gorbachev carried the potential both of rebuilding the USSR into a democratic federation, perhaps of reduced size, with a sustainable economy, or of destroying it. In the end, history took the latter road. However, it seems clear that it was not perestroika that caused the end of the USSR, but rather a combination of several long-term and short-term factors.

Of the crises that existed even before Gorbachev took office, the problems in foreign relations could be resolved. For a period of time it was also possible to stabilize the problems related to the state's legitimacy and its leadership. While in the short term, the reform measures did accomplish a new social dynamic and boost the state's legitimacy, the

[127] Matlock (1995: 4).

[128] Tocqueville (1856: 214).

economic reforms failed due to the dimension of the problem and the inflexibility of the system. The economy remained fragile under Gorbachev and even deteriorated. This failure not only undermined the legitimacy of the state leadership once again, it also restricted the room for maneuvering in its foreign policy. The crisis thus entered a second phase. On the one hand, the already existing economic problems intensified and as a result, the crisis of legitimacy reemerged, fueling the search for a new source of legitimacy on the periphery: national independence. On the other hand, the de-ideologization promoted by Gorbachev, as well as the growing rejection of the control of opinion, one-party dictatorship and the use of violence, deprived the Soviet Union of its most important instruments for integration. These two factors—the progressive de-legitimization of the state, and the widening of political maneuvering space among the population—inspired many peoples to seek national independence. This happened first in the "outer empire," where the communist regimes were disposed of in the "Velvet Revolutions" of 1989–1990, ultimately causing these countries to split from the Eastern "bloc." The disintegration then also affected the Soviet Union itself: of its 15 republics, 14 declared themselves independent in 1991. The coup undertaken by the opponents of reform was unable to halt the central government's decline of power and the state's collapse. It rather accelerated and augmented the process.

Thus, the demise of the USSR was, as Alex Pravda has observed, "overwhelmingly the result of domestic factors"[129]—a deepening economic crisis, growing disillusionment and frustration with the regime and its ideological basis, and, finally, expanded political liberty. The last allowed both democrats and champions of national independence to become more active. "One of the most significant reasons for the Soviet collapse was the emergence during the 1980s of an understanding that the totalitarian one-party one-policy model of a multinational state was wrong,"[130] as Alexander Chubar'yan has stated. Important, albeit secondary, roles were played by various international factors, including the relaxation of East–West tension, which allowed Gorbachev to proceed with perestroika and liberalization, the external affirmation of the Soviet leader's course by Western leaders and media as well as the Western public, and the deepening frustration of Soviet citizens about their own state upon learning more about the West. Perhaps more important was 1989 and the mutual inspiration of the anticommunist and anti-Soviet opposition in Poland, Hungary, the Baltics and Western Ukraine. Most Western leaders made sincere efforts not to destabilize the USSR or Gorbachev, but rather tried to save both the Union and its leader, even demanding that the Baltic states temporarily suspend the restoration of their independence. Paradoxically, this cautious Western approach and the end of the Cold War may have had the opposite effect. The Cold War and the carefully nurtured myth of hostile encirclement had helped to hold the USSR and the Eastern "bloc" together.[131] With

[129] Pravda (2010: 356–363).

[130] Chubarian (1994: 149).

[131] Chubarian (1994: 152); cf. Zubok (1994: 162).

communist propaganda of the Western "bogeyman" fading in the late 1980s, centrifugal forces in Eastern Europe and the USSR received more leeway. Moreover, Western restraint helped to uphold Gorbachev's decision to renounce the use of force.

Of the two "intertwined processes" that constituted this development, the move of the communist regime toward more pluralist and democratic attitudes started in a top-down process, whereas the dissolution of the Union into its constituent parts proceeded bottom-up. While perestroika was driven by at least in part Western ideas, yet without significant Western involvement, the dissolution was nurtured to a large extent by the peculiarities of Soviet pseudo-federalist nationality policy. For decades, Soviet policy had both stimulated and suppressed nationalist ideas among the state's peoples: on the one hand, it increased their national awareness and even provided them with certain insignia of nation states, but on the other, it never granted them genuine autonomy, much less independence.[132]

In the dissolution process, nonviolence prevailed. Although Karen Dawisha has pointed to the "rather important detail that force was in fact employed in Kazakhstan (December 1986), Georgia (April 1989), Uzbekistan (June 1989), Azerbaijan (January 1990), Tajikistan (February 1990), and Lithuania (January 1991),"[133] and Latvia, in the fall of 1991, after (and probably because of) the failed coup attempt, the Soviet army made no attempt at upholding the Union—most likely because of the coup's failure and army officers and soldiers shifting their loyalty to their own "new" states.[134]

4.1 Inevitability

In his study of "the last Soviet generation," Alexei Yurchak observed that "although the system's collapse had been unimaginable before it began, it appeared unsurprising when it happened."[135] While this aptly catches the perspective of 1991, it leaves open the question of historical inevitability. Unavoidable, therefore, is the controversial question of whether, within the specific historical constellation of the Soviet Union at the time, its disintegration was inevitable.

In his influential article "Causes of the Collapse of the USSR," published in 1992, Alexander Dallin rejected what he called essentialist arguments that see the "genetic code" of the USSR, which was built on illegitimate force and violence, as having made the disintegration of the Soviet system "predetermined." Similarly, Helmut Altrichter has concluded that one must remain skeptical of any claims that the outcome was unavoidable.[136] Authors inside and outside Russia, not least Gorbachev himself, have argued that

[132] Pravda (2010: 356–363). On nationality policy, see Suny et al. (2001); Martin (2001); Hirsch (2005). On Western policy, Wallander (2003); and, most recently, Plokhy (2014).

[133] Dawisha (2004: 514).

[134] Taylor (2003: 63).

[135] Yurchak (2005: 1).

[136] Altrichter (2002: 523).

not only the Soviet Union, but also the CMEA and the Warsaw Pact could certainly have survived despite the crises they were encountering. The states in question had highly educated populations, largely functioning institutions, and industries that although backward in comparison to the West, were quite developed. In fact, for some they could be theoretically conceived as democratically reformed and thus, legitimate formations. Their demise is thus sometimes explained as having been due to coincidence, with a number of crisis factors occurring simultaneously with the fall in the price of oil. Others refer to personal factors, such as the rivalry between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, or the attempts of the elites on the periphery to gain new legitimacy by supporting the idea of independence—an idea that thanks to perestroika could suddenly be articulated more freely than had been possible in all the years since 1917.

As the most important "preconditions" of the Soviet demise, Dallin identified (a) the loosening of state control; (b) the spread of corruption; (c) the erosion of ideology; (d) social change; (e) increasing interaction with the West; and (f) the economic crisis. He continued, however, by stating that "while they were necessary, they were not sufficient for what actually occurred in the 1990s."[137] Nonetheless, in most if not all of these areas, the liberalizing policies undertaken in the Gorbachev years, as he has written, are "an essential part of the explanation of the collapse. They are not sufficient by themselves to explain it, but they are, ironically or tragically, a vital link in the chain of destabilization, delegitimation, and disintegration."[138] Yet, Vladimir Shlapentokh has reminded us that "we cannot exclude the possibility that the Soviet Union would have endured the crisis of 1990–1991." He went on to say: "Before 1985, Soviet society faced many problems, but most of these difficulties did not jeopardize the existence of the system."[139] In a similar vein, Steven Kotkin points out that the USSR had not collapsed before 1985,[140] and Vladislav Zubok puts much of the blame for the trigger on Gorbachev personally, insisting that the Soviet leader's "'remedies' were killing the sick patient."[141]

In a recent monograph, Zubok points to several causes of the Soviet demise, such as the cost of the Soviet Cold War against the West, the low prestige of communist ideology, the economic crisis, national independence movements, and internal opposition against perestroika. In the end, Zubok argues the USSR was "destroyed first by Gorbachev's reforms and then by the implacable separatism of Yeltsin's course of action."[142] Despite increasing tendencies toward national splintering, in March 1991 when the referendum was held, the Union as a federation was certainly not doomed altogether. To be sure, Soviet outer empire structures such as the Warsaw Pact Organization were scarcely viable after they no longer

[137] Dallin (1992: 282).

[138] Ibid.: 297.

[139] Shlapentokh (2001: 9 and 179).

[140] Kotkin (2008: 1).

[141] Zubok (2007: 307).

[142] Zubok (2021: 397).

provided their non-Soviet members sufficient benefits and had become associated with military suppression. But a reformed USSR itself seems to have been sustainable, albeit reduced in size—without the Baltic states, Moldova and Georgia, likely without Armenia and Azerbaijan and, possibly, without Ukraine. Political and economic reform had achieved some results in all of the former soviet republics. Since the largest, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, have since 1991 found economically sustainable paths, there is no reason to conclude that this would have been impossible in a smaller Union consisting of Russia, Belarus and the Central Asian republics had there been no August coup attempt. Pointing to the imbalance between Russia and the other republics, Vladislav Zubok has considered this scenario unlikely.[143] Yet, the mentioned structural imbalances had already existed for 70 years in the USSR.

In contrast, structuralists trace the roots of the Soviet collapse and its causes back to early Soviet history, regarding perestroika merely as the final trigger of the state's dissolution. Various factors have been used to support the idea of the USSR's end being inevitable, including structural aspects, the dimensions of the crisis, and the major role played by violence and oppression in the Soviet state building. Coercion, together with the elimination of pluralist opinion and political competition, was the basis not only for communist rule in Russia but also for the integration of its many peripheral republics. It was thus the basis of the Soviet Union itself. The same was true for the "outer empire" in Eastern Europe. As soon as the imperial center stopped using coercion of this type, the cohesion of the empire's structures was endangered, if not even doomed. Theodore von Laue answered the question "Could the Soviet Union have been saved?" by saying: "Not according to the analysis here sketched. Gorbachev himself had repudiated the essentials of government in a united Eurasia: centralized control, protection of cultural sovereignty and the use of force as the ultimate guarantee of unity. Once the lid was taken off, even if slightly, the underlying traditional anarchic diversity reasserted itself, especially as economic conditions worsened."[144]

From this viewpoint, the Bolshevik one-party dictatorship was so closely linked to the essence of the Soviet Union and its international organizations that without each other, they were neither conceivable nor capable of survival. Alain Besancon has summed this up by stating that he could "not see the Soviet system reforming itself into something really different without ceasing to be the Soviet system."[145] By the time Gorbachev began the step-by-step dismantling of Leninist dictatorship elements, suppression, the application of force and censorship, and started to introduce non-Leninist concepts and features such as non-violence, freedom of speech, market elements, the possibility for private initiative, political participation, pluralist democracy, self-determination and, finally, elements of

[143] Zubok (2017: 270).

[144] Quoted from Nove (1994: 144).

[145] Quoted from Cohen (2004: 460).

federalism, the Soviet system was already withering away. Mark Beissinger went even further by claiming that "force could not have saved the USSR."[146]

It does seem that the USSR was highly dysfunctional already before 1985, both politically and economically. For this reason, one can accept that either reform or collapse of the Soviet system as it existed before 1985 was unavoidable. And yet, the example of the People's Republic of China shows that limited economic reform might have been enough to prolong the existence of communist suppression. There are two major differences between these two examples, however:

The first concerns the multiethnic federal structure of the USSR. Some of its parts had distinct national characters and histories as independent entities. As had been predicted by Soviet dissident Andrey Amalrik in 1969, this played an important role in the state's dissolution.[147] Serhii Plokhy states that "while the lost arms race, economic decline, democratic resurgence, and bankruptcy of communist ideals all contributed to the Soviet implosion, they did not predetermine the disintegration of the Soviet Union. That was caused by the imperial foundations, multiethnic composition, and pseudofederal structure of the Soviet state."[148] Since "imperial rule is incompatible with electoral democracy [. . .] the conflict between them led to the fall of the world's last empire."

The second concerns what Chris Miller has described as unreformability of the Soviet political-economic system. While in the People's Republic of China, Mao had succeeded in crushing agrarian or military intra-party lobbies, in the USSR they had gained in political weight since the mid-1960s and were able to effectively blocking any cutbacks in the allocation of state funds: "The Soviet system proved unreformable not because its economic problems were insurmountable, but because it entrusted vast political power to groups that had every reason to sabotage efforts to resolve the country's economic dilemmas. [. . .] The Soviet system gave power to a new ruling class: generals, collective farm managers, and industrial bosses, all of whom benefitted from waste and inefficiency."[149]

When looking at the role of perestroika in the USSR's economic and ideological collapse as well as in its political dissolution, it is clear that it was, albeit unintentionally, rather a trigger than the cause. Neither planned economy nor "allegiance to Soviet socialism" was unavoidably destroyed by perestroika, as has been claimed.[150] But the USSR had never been able to feed its population sustainably, and ideological disillusionment had been widespread long before Gorbachev's rise. While in the 1970s, the oil hike had "seemed to save the Soviet Union," what it really did was merely delay "the inevitable."[151] It was Gorbachev's personal drama that upon achieving the liberation of his

[146] Beissinger (2002: 371).
[147] Amalrik (1970).
[148] Plokhy (2014: xxxi–xxxii).
[149] Miller (2016: 181–182).
[150] Kotkin (2008: 3).
[151] Kotkin (2008: 16).

country from most of the remnants of its totalitarian past and introducing economic reform and democratic principles, he watched it crumble under initiatives taken by just those whose maneuvering space he had contributed to widening so significantly.[152] Yet without his liberalizing policies, it can hardly be imagined that the Union could have disintegrated without substantial armed resistance. In the ideological void that was left by the crumbling of Soviet communism, two powerful ideas of the nineteenth century gained in support: liberal democracy and national independence. While liberalization brought about the first component of the end of the USSR, i.e. the transformation of the communist regime, national independence was the idea fostering the second element, i.e. the decomposition of the Union. Since the Union and the communist regime were closely tied to one another, the demise of both was too. As can be seen from the support that was given by Boris Yeltsin to the independence movements in the non-Russian republics, the struggles against the regime and the Union were also linked. Marc Beissinger has argued that, in fact, the alliance between Russian liberals and non-Russian national independence movements against the regime and the Union became "key to the eventual outcome of Soviet collapse."[153]

4.2 Legacy

The legacy of the USSR is certainly ambivalent. On the positive side, achievements in the spheres of industrialization, culture, education, and science and technology need to be taken into account, as should the Soviet contribution to the defeat of the Axis powers in World War II and to development in the Third World. On the negative side stand the creation of a criminal totalitarian regime, mass terror, the killing of about 20 million people, the suppression of Soviet citizens and entire nations, an often aggressive foreign policy, and economic failure. Karen Dawisha has pointed to the fact that "structural violence was at the heart of the Soviet system, irrespective of its undisputed but completely tangential contribution to alleviating illiteracy and improving those sections of the population not otherwise killed, repressed, displaced, not born, or subjected to unfair and inhumane treatment because of the 'sins' of their relatives."[154]

Today, Russian society is split between appreciating the benefits of market economy and certain freedoms on the one hand, and nostalgia for the Soviet superpower status and the period's social security and feeling of safety on the other. J. Arch Getty stressed in 2000 that "for a surprising number of people today in the former Soviet Union, terror does not wholly negate achievements such as universal literacy, one of the best technological-education systems in the world, the first man in space, free education and health care,

[152] Plokhy (2014: xxxiv).
[153] Beissinger (2002: 389).
[154] Dawisha (2004: 517).

and security in old age."[155] Since then, and most likely as a consequence of state policies aiming at "reintegrating" the Soviet past into a historical narrative of national-imperial grandeur, this trend has gained in strength. Opinion polls reveal regularly, that 50–75% of Russians regret the end of the USSR and/or communism.[156] In April 2019, a record 70% of Russians approved of Soviet leader Josef Stalin.[157] Outside Russia, such nostalgia is much less significant, although in the political culture, infrastructure and certain types of behavior in some of the former republics, traces, sometimes symbolic, of the USSR are still present.

In contrast, however, to convictions widespread in Russia and carefully nurtured by Russian state media, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was neither the result of a Western conspiracy nor, as President Vladimir Putin claimed in 2005, was it a "major geopolitical disaster of the twentieth century."[158] In fact, the West rather tried to prevent than hasten the fall of the USSR. Moreover, and the benefits of the end of the Soviet regime aside, it was certainly no disaster for Russians, compared to other, much larger disasters of the twentieth century such as the Civil War, the Famine, the Terror, and World War II. Although some 25 million ethnic Russians suddenly became citizens of foreign states in 1991/92, this never endangered their personal or political wellbeing. Due to the mostly responsible actions of the involved leaders, no major attempts at expulsing ethnic groups were made other than in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Inter-republican borders were mostly recognized as inviolable, despite a few small ethnic conflicts having been frozen with direct Russian involvement, as for example in Moldova and Georgia. No major unilateral changes were made until the Russian–Georgian War of 2008 and the Russian aggression against Ukraine from 2014. Thus, in 1991 a major war was circumvented. In many respects, one may concur with the widespread saying that the best part in Soviet history was its end.

Nonetheless, as Dawisha stated in 2003, for many the "question of all questions" remains not whether the Soviet Union could have been reformed, "but rather was the Soviet Union worth saving and will the USSR or a similar authoritarian variant be back?"[159] The last question has been underlined not only by the increasingly authoritarian regime in post-Soviet Russia, the suppression of dissent, and the reinstatement of state control over the media, but also by Russia's increasingly hostile attitude toward the West and aggressive foreign policy. More than 10 years later, in 2014, Serhii Plokhy argued that the Russian clash with Ukraine reveals "with unprecedented clarity that the drama of the disintegration of Europe's last empire is far from being over."[160] The start of Russia's full

[155] Quoted from Dawisha (2004: 523).

[156] *The Moscow Times* (2018). The Levada Center "has conducted the poll since March 1992. In that time, regret for the Soviet collapse peaked in 2000 at 75 percent, but only fell below 50 percent once–in 2012." In December 2018, the level was at 66 percent.

[157] *The Moscow Times* (2019).

[158] Putin (2005).

[159] Dawisha (2004: 526).

[160] Plokhy (2014: xxii).

fledged war against Ukraine in 2022 has confirmed this expectation. While the full extent of the USSR's afterlife will be revealed only in the decades to come, the historic significance of its demise is already clearly visible today.

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A Never-Ending Empire? The Decline of the United Kingdom

Michael Gehler and Tjark Strich

The decisive slogan that led to the Brexit vote on the 23rd of June in 2016 was "taking back control". This had much to do with the history of the British Empire. In this paper we will first characterize what constitutes this empire, although historical research relatively agrees that we are dealing with different British Empires. At first there was a trading empire, then a classical empire, and finally a Commonwealth empire. Therefore, it is important to consider these different orders with various aspects. It is only necessary to deal with this in a cursory manner, because the main goal of this contribution is about "decline". It is about an empire—so far the initial thesis, which has not yet come to an end in the minds of the people, with many implications regarding Brexit. As a consequence, it will also be necessary to look at the difficult relations between Britain and the history of the European Communities after 1945.

1 Conditions for Emergence and Development Factors

The British Empire of modern times was global. It spanned several continents and at times it was completely without competition, which made its rise and development possible. It thus possessed extensive sovereignty and superiority.[1] When did contemporaries speak of this empire? A quotation from the English parliament from 1533 laconically and succinctly

[1] Ferguson (2002).

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stated: "England is an Empire".[2] However, this term did not immediately catch on. Rather, the term is used to refer to "Great Britain" and later to the "United Kingdom". The notion "Empire" appears occasionally. It refers to a community of countries and nations. The "United Kingdom" and "Great Britain" are then more in use after the unification with Scotland (1707). It is important to note that this term was by no means only used to designate an overseas empire, but, according to English legal doctrine, meant a sovereign state authority which no longer recognizes any authority over itself. This is a central aspect that we find again in the Brexit debate. The last sovereign is the British Parliament. We are dealing here with an absolute parliamentary sovereignty which is perhaps less important to the people but more important to the political elites. In addition to globalism, intercontinentalism, non-competitiveness as well as sovereignty, superiority and the community of countries and nations, there has also been an exaggeration of one's own magnificence.

Even before the Dutch, some 1600 Englishmen had founded the British East India Company (BEIC), which was to establish long-distance trade on a colonial basis.[3] The company incorporated India into the global capitalist system. The price of private empire building for ordinary people was economic displacement, cultural subjugation as well as hunger and need.[4] The strength of Parsons' partly provocative, partly exaggerated study lies in his plea to take into account those affected by imperial rule, i.e. to write an "empire history from below". The "bottom-up" approach offers a potential explanation for the disintegration and downfall of empires.[5]

A network of different structures formed a larger construct of the British Empire. There were public-private partnerships under the royal protection of Queen Elizabeth I., owner companies such as Maryland and Pennsylvania, but also private initiatives like public companies such as the South African Company under Cecil Rhodes. There were neither specific master plans, nor war-strategic objectives of expansive power politics. This was different with the three naval wars against Holland between 1652 and 1674 or the seven great wars against France between 1689 and 1815, which served to establish the country's supremacy overseas and to develop it as a maritime, trading, and colonial power. Actors were also needed as pioneers of the Empire, such as Sir Walter Raleigh (1552/54–1618), who was a favorite of Elizabeth I. He was a navigator, explorer, soldier, spy, politician, poet, and writer all in one.[6] In 1615 he pronounced the memorable sentence which states that world domination presupposed maritime dominion.[7]

[2] Wende (2014: 1102).

[3] Wende (2014: 1103).

[4] Parsons (2010: 169–229).

[5] Osterhammel (1995: 119–120).

[6] Sinclair (1984).

[7] Elvert (2018: 341).

Fig. 1 The Kingdom of Great Britain in the year 1754 (Based on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Blank_maps#/media/File:BlankMap-World.svg and https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Empire_evolution3.gif, Editing: Tjark Strich)

In the eighteenth century, the British and French struggled for hegemony in Europe and the world, with the British Crown holding its own with its superior fleet. With the victory of the East-India Company under Robert Clive over Nawab of Bengal, Calcutta was acquired in 1757. This marks a turning point in British rule over India and the transition from a trade-oriented imperial form to a stronger orientation as a territorial political actor with power-political interests (see Fig. 1).

In the Peace of Paris (1763) after the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), France had to cede most of its colonies to Britain. The remains of the colonial possessions in North America were sold to the USA under Napoleon Bonaparte in 1803. But the British Empire experienced not only profits but also losses, as it had to give up its North American colonies after the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America (1776).[8]

However, due to European self-defeating at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the nineteenth century, London was able to strengthen its empire again through its victorious naval rule against Napoleon, and built a second colonial empire in the second half of the nineteenth century.[9] This consolidated and developed into an empire with the greatest territorial reach in world history (see Fig. 2).

It was Lord George Nathaniel Curzon, Marquess of Kedleston (1859–1925), a conservative British statesman and Vice King of India from 1899 to 1905, who proudly and confidently summed up in 1900: "There has never been anything so great in the world

[8] Brendon (2008), Wende (2014: 1116).

[9] Hobsbawm (1987), Hyam (1993).

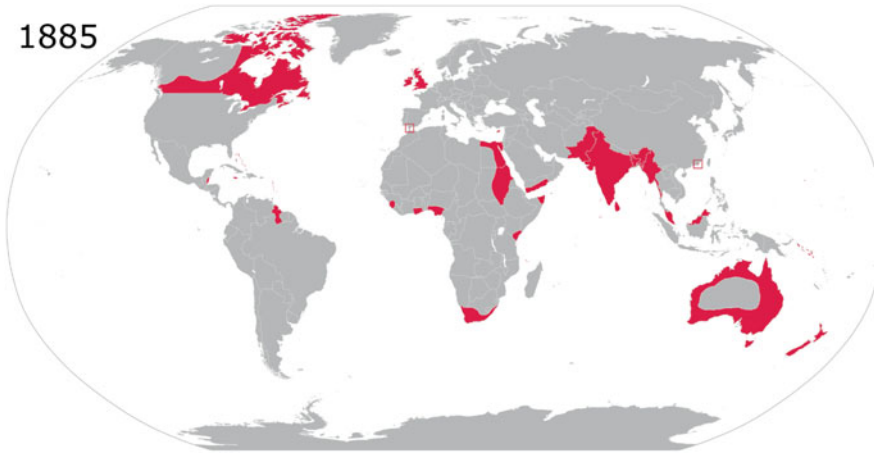

Fig. 2 The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in the year 1885 (Based on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Blank_maps#/media/File:BlankMap-World.svg and https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Empire_evolution3.gif, Editing: Tjark Strich)

history than the British Empire".[10] The awareness of the unique magnificence and a factual comprehensiveness is expressed in this quotation.

Great Britain, with Prime Minister David Lloyd George, was the big winner of the Paris suburban treaties of 1919/20 (see Fig. 3), even if the latter had to resign due to the unresolved Turkey question: The Empire's global concerns could in any case be secured, cooperation with the USA could continue, Germany could be eliminated as a colonial power, but its position as a continental power could essentially be maintained in order to ensure the system of balance of power in Europe.[11]

At this time the territories dominated by the United Kingdom were over 37 million square kilometers in size. This was about 25% of the earth's land surface. Moreover, it was the largest extension of the British Empire in 1922, with a total of about 400 million inhabitants out of a world population of about two billion at that time.[12]

In the sense of multiplicity and diversity, the Empire included settlement and domination colonies, protectorates, a network of the most diverse direct and indirect constellations of rule in the course of its later development, including partly sovereign individual states. The Commonwealth had a network of trade relations and naval bases.[13] For the twentieth century, the British Empire was a world empire in maritime and territorial terms. For a land and sea empire we have coined the term "amphibious empire".[14]

[10] Wende (2014: 1102).

[11] Schwabe (2019: 226).

[12] Osterhammel (1983), Wende (2008).

[13] Wende (2008: 1014).

[14] Gehler and Rollinger (2014: 1–29, 22).

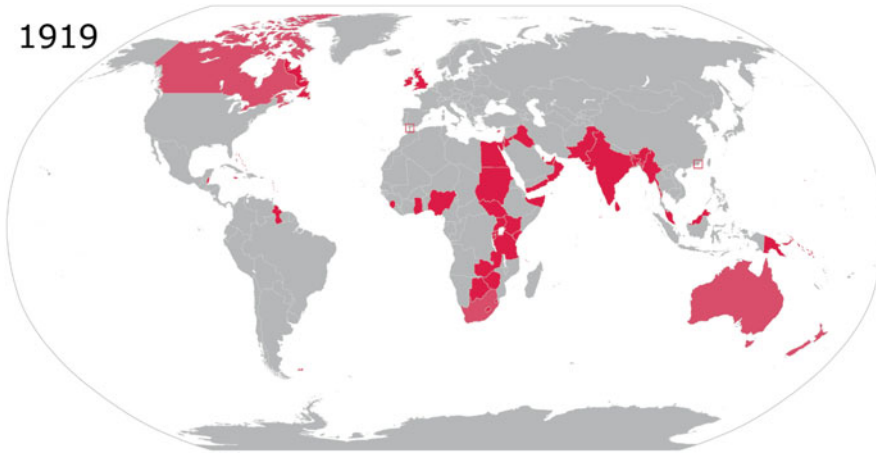

Fig. 3 The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in the year 1919. Dominions shown in a lighter shade (Based on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Blank_maps#/media/File:BlankMap-World.svg and https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Empire_evolution3.gif, Editing: Tjark Strich)

The quest for imperial eternity was combined with a high degree of flexibility. The British Empire is the only empire in modern history that has extended with varying intensity across the globe and over the centuries. From the nineteenth century onwards, the idea of the nation state also became compatible with the concept of empire and generated a British nationalism that manifested itself in a specific englishness, which was also expressed in the Brexit vote. There was not even a master plan for the different types of British empires mentioned above, neither for the trading empire nor for the classical empire, rather and then more so for the British Commonwealth and for the Commonwealth Empire, which were two different things.

2 Organization, Structure, and Reorientation

How was this empire organized? The transition from a trading empire to an imperial structure with political domination was the result of migratory pressure. As a result of population growth, England experienced a mass emigration that was unprecedented both in scale and form. In total, more than half a million people left the country during the 17th and 18th centuries. Mostly young people who were able to work, left the British Isles for America. This was no longer just to exploit local labour overseas as conquerors, but also to build a new existence through their own work. A separation between center and periphery followed. In the beginning trade still dominates. This is proven by the trading companies, but also by legal acts such as the Navigation Act (1651). It means that the traffic to and from the colonies had to be handled by English ships or those from the colonies. This led to the

expansion of English naval power. The Staple Act (1663) required every import to the colonies, to be made exclusively via England. The central body was the Board of Trade, which acted as an intermediary body between the royal government and the colonies. The Department of Trade was responsible for overseeing the administration of the colonies. Their self-government encouraged the extensive abstinence from the state. Thus, a dualistic administration developed with elements of colonial self-administration on the one hand and a growing centralized administration on the other. This also partly created frictions and tensions with internal conflicts of British Empire politics, caused by the mixture of direct and indirect rule. With the victory over France in the Seven Years War (1763), London organized its empire more efficiently.

The older British Empire lost its core through the uprising and separation of the North American settlement colonies. But this loss was compensated by a reorientation of the Empire towards Asia and India respectively[15] as visualized in Figs. 1 and 2.

Although the loss of the American colonies was the beginning of the end of the mercantile empire, it did not mean the end of the British empire overseas. A new phase began almost seamlessly after 1783. Economic arguments and goals lost their importance. More and more, the Empire developed into a structure of political rule. Trade lost considerably in relevance. British exports and imports in the nineteenth century fell to 20% and 25% respectively. Comparable to the older Empire, the trading empire, there was still no generally valid and consistent concept in the nineteenth century. There was no elaborated master plan for maintaining and expanding into a classical empire. Accidental reasons led to this development. Migration pressure arose as a result of the population explosion around the middle of the eighteenth century, from around 5.7 million in England and Wales to around 45 million in the whole of the United Kingdom by 1913. In the course of the nineteenth century, a growing awareness of empire and mission among the exponents of imperial society was discernible. This is demonstrated by statements such as those of Cecil Rhodes: “The British are the finest race in the world”.[16]

As a sign of moral superiority, on which the claim to global political supremacy was based, not only was the abolition of and the fight against the still long existing slavery[17] propagated, although this was practically not always realized, but wars were also waged against those who dared to oppose British rule. This is an unmistakable parallel to the history of the expansion of the USA, which replaced the British Empire, and also not to accept another empire next to it, or to let one arise and continue to exist. Like the American one, the British idea of mission was also connected with Christianity, which is represented by the Scottish missionary and explorer in Africa David Livingstone (1813–1873), who

[15] Osterhammel (1983).

[16] Wende (2014: 1108).

[17] Anstey (1975), Walvin (1982, 1986, 2000).

proclaimed in 1857 in Cambridge: "I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity".[18]

3 Efficiency, Imperial Continuity, and Transformation

The Royal Navy was important for the transition from a trading empire to a classical empire. The Royal Navy formed the basis for the rise of the United Kingdom, not only as an economic but also as a political power in the nineteenth century, capable of securing the British Empire against external enemies. Walter Raleigh's prophecy became increasingly important: "Whoever controls the sea controls trade. Whoever controls trade rules the riches of this world and the world itself".[19]

The practice of imperial rule was essentially based on the superior war fleet in the face of imperial competitors. But even around 1900 the British navy counted only about 100,000 sailors. However, they ensured that the patriotic anthem "Britannia rules the waves" could be sung. In contrast to nowadays' imperial competition between China, Russia, and the USA with competing land, sea, and world powers, today there is more than just one amphibious empire. In terms of range, however, it is the USA that can reach all seas with its aircraft carriers.

Until the modern age, the existence of great empires depended on the existence of a strong political center and the ability to expand militarily, i.e. on the willingness to wage war. The British Empire possessed these central capabilities without making excessive use of them because there was no need for it after the defeat of Napoleon.

Control of the British Empire within the imperial structure was relatively modest in the nineteenth century compared with its European rivals. In 1898, the British army had only 215,000 men, while the German army was more than twice that number and France's forces were four times as strong. However, 150,000 Indian soldiers complemented the 75,000 British soldiers stationed in India. After the victory at Waterloo (1815), the British army was only involved in two major wars until 1914, the Crimean War (1853–56) and the (second) Boer War (1899–1902). So, it was possible—apart from the Indian uprising—to convincingly proclaim a Pax Britannica under Queen Victoria.[20] This was achieved in the Victorian age with few manageable military undertakings. Imperial policy was always guided by the idea of efficiency. The maxim of British imperial policy was to keep the financial burden on the overseas empire as low as possible in the interests of the parliamentarians in London and the taxpayers they represented. In practice, the people in

[18] Wende (2014: 1108).

[19] Elvert (2018: 341).

[20] Morris (1992).

the colonies had to pay for the costs of British rule. Indians paid for the pensions of former British civil servants living in England.[21]

A new development in British Empire's history was initiated by the Statute of Westminster (1931), which was passed by the British Parliament. This document formally gave legislative independence to the dominions of what is now called the British Commonwealth of Nations. Supremacy, otherwise fully applicable to the Empire, was now abolished for the Dominions, although the statute was delayed in its implementation. For the dominions, remaining in the Empire was now de facto only a voluntary act that could be terminated at any time.

The idea of the nation state, nationalism and sovereignty, which was developing in Europe, was also imitated and adopted in non-European regions, especially in the colonies of the Europeans. Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Mahatma Gandhi were the most important exponents of the Indian struggle for independence. Their country had already striven for independence before the Second World War. Due to the increasing emancipation efforts, the British Empire was threatened with heavy losses. Reluctantly, London had to give up Burma, India, and Pakistan after the end of the Second World War. British withdrawal and partition were followed by a disaster with violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims and the emergence of the Kashmir conflict.[22]

In contrast to Asia and the Middle East, British colonial policy reacted more successfully to the independence attempts in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. While guaranteeing political stability and continuity in trade policy, the Empire combined this with the offer of self-government. Thus, according to Franz Ansprenger, after the cost-intensive and loss-making Second World War, Britain did not dismantle its British Empire, but rather established a new "Commonwealth of Nations". This clever new colonial practice was also combined with the reference to a better, new and more humane world order, and thus parallel pressure was exerted on the other European colonial powers such as Belgium, France, and the Netherlands in order to persuade them to balance and withdraw their colonial ambitions.[23]

4 The Classic Arguments for Decline

Let us now turn to the generally known reasons for the decline of the Empire, whereby the point in time or period of its end is always connected with a question mark. A common, even classic argument for the establishment of declining empires is that of the overstretch of power. In the case of the British Empire, the decline can be explained, *firstly,* by various

[21] Wende (2014).

[22] Seal (1968), Mishra (2013).

[23] Ansprenger (1981: 162).

resurgent empires or new rising world powers in the sign of the Age of Extremes,[24] *secondly*, by the reversal of the military protective function, *thirdly,* by the loss of the ability to defend oneself, *fourthly,* by the loss of the ability to mediate and, *fifthly,* by inferiority in the competition of the superpowers in the sign of decolonisation.[25] *Sixthly*, the failed attempt to build an empire of simulation through the transition of the British Commonwealth into a Commonwealth of Nations, quasi as a kind of third empire of a transformable world power, should be mentioned specifically. This attempt resulted in the loss of the leading role in the old Commonwealth under the sign of a multi racial Commonwealth. *Seventhly*, as the final symptom of the already declining and ending empire, the failed attempt to influence the European Union process in such a way that it corresponds to the ideas of the Conservatives and Parliament must be noted.

In the first case, the replacement of the British position of world power by the United States of America from the second half of the twentieth century,[26] which became apparent during the Second World War, is meant. But to answer the decline, one will have to go back as far as the 18th and 19th centuries.[27] Some historians do believe that decline began to start during the 1880s of the long nineteenth century.[28] The proclamation of the Pax Britannica is described as the peak of the Empire,[29] after which decline set in. This is illustrated by the rise of the United States of America after the successful war against Spain (1898), but also by Japan's victory in the war against Russia (1905). Given the fact, a relative decline of the Empire is already assumed for the years 1895 to 1905.[30] Problems with the recruitment of Indian civil servants already existed in the late nineteenth century, which were linked to the rise of Indian nationalism.[31] The First World War, which can also be understood as a struggle of empires,[32] undoubtedly challenged the Empire while the United States rose to become a globalized world power.[33]

The apparent peak of British world power in the face of the greatest territorial reach at the beginning of the 1920s was simultaneously expressed in the discrepancy between global expansion and simultaneous overstretching of the ability to mobilize resources. In the age of extremes[34] with worldwide conflicts and competing empires such as the United States of America, the Soviet Union and the Third Reich, the British world power role was

[24] Hobsbawm (1994).
[25] Darwin (1988), Hyam (2007), Buettner (2016).
[26] Maier (2006).
[27] Brendon (2008).
[28] Friedberg (2010).
[29] Morris (1992).
[30] Friedberg (2010).
[31] Seal (1968), Mishra (2013).
[32] Pocock (1998).
[33] Ambrose (1993: 381–407).
[34] Hobsbawm (1995: 285–323).

overstretched. The Empire lost not only political, but also economic and monetary power. Even though Anglo-Saxon capitalism was able to maintain its dominance, the pound sterling lost ground against the American dollar, which was its rival currency. The Bretton Woods system (1944) heralded the global role of the dollar as a lead currency.

The end of other empires also plunged the British Empire into stability crises. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the further development of the Middle East are examples of how the Empire had to struggle with these new challenges and was destined to fail: Was it the Turkish question after the First World War, so the Palestinian question after the Second World War.

The Empire's heritage is as diverse as it is ambivalent: constitutionally, it has various constitutional forms, and multinationally, many new nation states are emerging. The legacy is both conflict-oriented and crisis-ridden at the same time. After India's independence (1947), its division led to a bloody civil war and political turmoil with Pakistan. The British did not succeed in making a peaceful and orderly withdrawal from Palestine. The conflict in the Middle East with its policy of occupation and state of war between Israelis and Palestinians continues to this day.

Within a generation, this overpowering imperial structure of the British experienced a decline, often amidst bloodshed. It has left behind a series of political dependencies on the United States of America, but also on Europe, and a specter of an empire, the Commonwealth, overshadowed by imperial America. Remaining was a controversial legacy: at best, a sporting spirit, a legal code, and an almost universal language; at worst, failed states and devastating conflicts.[35]

On the second point: The reversal of the military protective function means that although Great Britain was on the side of the victors in both world wars, the threatened decline of the Empire was hardly or no longer averted. In earlier times the motherland had guaranteed the protection of its colonies, i.e. the center ensured the existence of the periphery. In the twentieth century, this constellation was reversed. The metropolis saw itself dependent on the periphery for the defense of the overseas empire. In doing so, the alliance with the former colonies had proved its worth. In both world wars, the dominions stood of their own free will unswervingly behind the Empire, but increasingly also asserted their own claims to independence.

In respect of the third point: The Empire's dwindling ability to defend itself is evident from the fact that the colonies had to be more strongly conscripted into military service. This was particularly true for India, which in the twentieth century was considered the "great barracks" of the British Empire, providing 1.3 million soldiers in the First World War and 2.5 million in the Second. The Empire itself was no longer able to defend itself alone and under its own steam.

As to the fourth point: Winston S. Churchill's idea of being able to operate with Great Britain within the framework of three circles in the middle between the Soviet Union and

[35] Brendon (2008).

the USA after the Second World War, while Europe was only to act as a junior partner,[36] proved to be wishful thinking. The creeping loss of mediation capacity found expression in the wear and tear on the Empire during the Second World War and in the course of its disintegration process after 1945. The Empire had suffered such severe blows that the "imperialism of decolonization"[37] found its counterpart in the decolonization of Britain[38] and the occupation of the British Empire by the United States.[39] London now stood inferior to the superior superpowers. It was no longer in a position to act as a balancing and mediating factor between Moscow and Washington as it did at the beginning and in the first years of the Second World War. In many respects, the United States replaced the British Empire as its model and forerunner.[40]

Hyam describes the dysfunctional policies of an imperial system in dealing with post-war, inter-war, and war crises from 1918 to 1945, but he mainly focused on the post-1945 period and the gradual disintegration of the empire as a result of international criticism of colonialism,[41] (also see Fig. 4) and on the growing imbalance between Britain's capabilities and its global obligations. Hyam analyzes the transfer of power from India in 1947 to Swaziland in 1968, major crises such as the Suez crisis, and assesses the role of Winston S. Churchill, Clement Attlee, and Anthony Eden to Harold Macmillan and Harold Wilson as becoming almost powerless figures.[42]

On the fifth point: the inferiority of the disintegrating empire in the struggle of the superpowers became clear in the context of decolonization, using the example of the failed management of the Suez crisis (1956).[43] Nevertheless, the political elites and empire strategists in London succeeded in disguising the impression of decline and giving the public the feeling that they were still a world power. This disavowal could be argued to their own people and signalled to the outside world through permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (1945), founding membership of NATO (1949), and possession of the atomic bomb (1952).

With regard to the sixth point: in an almost ingenious legitimatory-propagandistic way, London seemed to understand how to drag the decline and disintegration of its colonial empire over decades. The British withdrawal from the colonies took longer than, for example, the French withdrawal, which in Asia and Africa was under much greater pressure from national liberation movements that forced decisions to be made. But the idea of a new kind of third empire was ultimately the British illusion of a transformable

[36] Kaiser (2006).
[37] Louis and Robinson (1994: 462–511).
[38] Louis (1978), Hyam (2007).
[39] Reynolds (1995).
[40] Maier (2006).
[41] Stuchtey (2010).
[42] Hyam (2007).
[43] Monroe (1981), Pickering (1998).

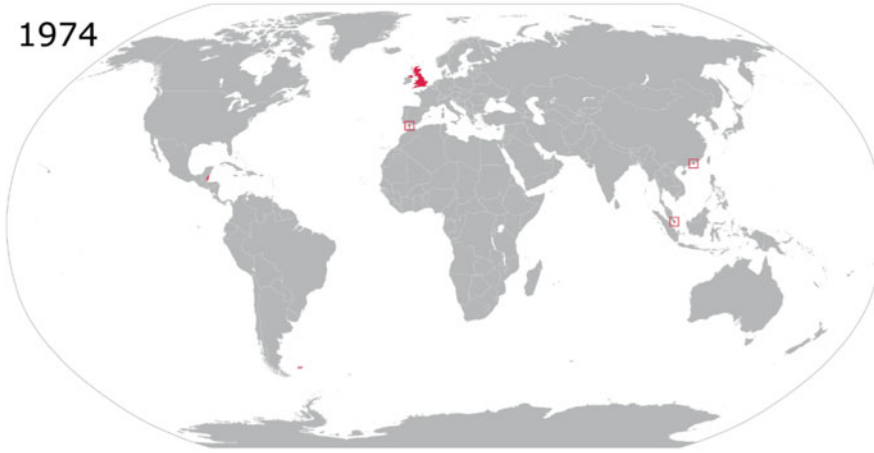

Fig. 4 The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the year 1974 (Based on: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Blank_maps#/media/File:BlankMap-World.svg and https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Empire_evolution3.gif, Editing: Tjark Strich)

empire, which was neither up to reality nor comparable to the demands of the classical empire of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last Vice King of India, was of the opinion that the Commonwealth was "the greatest opportunity ever offered to the Empire".[44] The British self-perception and their sense of reality were irreconcilably opposed to each other here. After India left the British Commonwealth of Nations in 1947 and was lost for the Empire, the British Commonwealth of Nations became a loose association of sovereign states, which now called itself the Commonwealth. It embodied a multi-racial Commonwealth with the loss of England's leading role.

As to the seventh point: "taking back control" was a final attempt to avert or compensate for the inferiority and downfall of the only imagined British Empire. However, the concern of British European policy in the 1950s to stay away from the European Communities and to assert itself on its own, was to prove to be a misconception. In the 1960s, when the British bid to join the European Communities began, and was not successful until 1973, British Foreign Secretary George Brown told his German counterpart Brandt: "Willy, you must get us in, so we can take the lead." Without quiet irony, but in all seriousness, Brown tried to make Brandt aware of the advantages of UK membership of the EC in 1967.[45] The idea of taking the lead in Europe as a member of the EC was also to prove to be a British miscalculation. The withdrawal from the continent, initiated by the Brexit referendum in 2016, was a last failed attempt to take back control. It will not be a way back to old greatness, but much more connected to the danger of the United Kingdom being divided

[44] Wende (2014: 1116).

[45] Brandt (1989: 453).

between England and Wales on the one hand and Northern Ireland and Scotland on the other.

What is an interim conclusion? The British Empire experienced a gradual decline. There was no abrupt collapse in the sense of a sudden implosion. Rather, the question that has been discussed to the very end and is still more relevant to research is: When exactly and why did the decline start? For a long time, historians have not been in agreement on this, but historical research offers various starting points which will now be presented in more detail.

5 Specific Reasons for the Debate on the Onset of the Decline of the British Empire in Historical Research

The question of a point in time, at which the British Empire started to show symptoms of decline is a question inherently linked to when the Empire was at its greatest. In other words, it is a matter of establishing the zenith of the Empire. Naturally, the proposed question does not intend to give an all-encompassing listing of the reasons for the decline of the British Empire, but rather attempts to single out the most noteworthy reasons and their implications for the point in time at which the decline of the British Empire commenced. At last, it is important to point out that this segment primarily speaks of the British Empire as a continuous whole, as opposed to the trading, classical and Commonwealth empire mentioned above, although the "different empires" will be used as an orientation in the subsequent proceedings.

5.1 The Dichotomy of Liberalism and Imperialism

One of the earliest signs of decline can be seen in the loss of the American colonies and with it, much of the substance of the old trading empire. However, it was not the loss of territory or commerce which constituted the decline, seeing how there was a substantial expansion of trade between Britain and the United States after the War for Independence. Indeed, trade increased significantly so that "the astonishing growth in commercial activity called the entire imperial enterprise into question".[46] It would seem that even in the eighteenth century the phenomena of increased efficiency of trade between free nations (as opposed to ruling and ruled nations) was observable. However, the decline manifested itself in a more abstract manner.

On the one hand, there stood something that the British populace had fought for and pioneered, including for example the Magna Carta (1215), the Habeas Corpus Act (1679) or the Bill of Rights (1689), somewhat in essence: liberalism. On the other hand, the lust for

[46] Brendon (2008: 10).

riches, splendor, and competition paradoxically propelled the British towards something from today's perspective almost opposite to that: imperialism. Ferguson sums it up as follows: "Could an empire, implying as it did British rule over foreign lands, be based on liberty?" and continues by explaining that "it was precisely this question that sparked the first great war of independence against the Empire".[47] Similarly, Brendon assesses that "in the last resort, liberty was at odds with empire, its ultimate solvent.".[48] Even if the colonists in America actually enjoyed a rather high degree of autonomy,[49] they also brought with them their families and a relatively unimpaired culture[50] and, moreover, their liberal ethos. Something which will be of special relevance in the later emerging Dominions of the Commonwealth Empire too. It is exactly that liberal ethos or rather the friction between that ethos and the desire for empire, which constitutes one of the earlier signs of decline.

However, the Empire did not break because of the loss of the American colonies. Quite on the contrary, in the century following the American War of Independence, the British achieved an undoubtedly unique and unprecedented status. Even before the loss of the Thirteen Colonies, the Empire expanded, at times unwillingly, into India. The aftermath of the Battle of Plassey (1757) placed the region of Bengal firmly into the British East India Company's hands,[51] while the Treaty of Allahabad (1765) cemented British rule in India through the newly gained right to collect taxes from the local population.[52]

The Third Anglo-Maratha War (1818) sealed the fate of India seemingly once and for all and, in retrospect, Roy concludes that "the Company was the main political and military power of India".[53]

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, one should not make the mistake of assuming that every further conquest into India was wholeheartedly planned by London. Indeed, the Pitt's India Act (1784) actually outlawed any subsequent conquests in India.[54] However, for example the extensive conquests of Richard Colley-Wellesly, the Governor-General in India between 1797 and 1805, proved the contrary. So, while it appears that London was at times not keen on the idea of adding new territory to its empire, they also effectively never stopped it, thus cementing the ambivalence between liberalism in the center and imperialism in the periphery.

[47] Ferguson (2002: 46).
[48] Brendon (2008: 6).
[49] Parry (1966: 113).
[50] Ferguson (2002: 53–54).
[51] Ferguson (2002: 30).
[52] Bhattacherje (2008: 96), Brendon (2008: 33).
[53] Roy (2019: 34).
[54] Brendon (2008: 35).

5.2 Hubris and Nemesis

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the British emerge as perhaps the "first true superpower"[55] in our history. It is not without reason that this time in history is more than occasionally referred to as the *Victorian Age*, which pronounces the unparalleled dominance and reach of the Empire at the time, whether it would be militarily, industrially, or financially. However, it is not without reason either that people borrow the cliché of *Hubris* more than occasionally too. While a multitude of reasons and examples can be given to highlight the at times arrogant nature of British foreign and domestic policy, this section will focus on three events to showcase the *pride before the fall*: the Abyssinian expedition (1868), the *White Mutiny* following the Ilbert Bill in 1883,[56] and the acquisition of Egypt (1882).

The Abyssinian expedition was an answer to the imprisonment of a couple of Europeans by the Abyssinian emperor, presumably as a ploy to gain recognition as he was the sole Christian monarch in Africa at the time.[57] It is not hard to imagine that a release of said prisoners could have been negotiated diplomatically in which both sides could have saved face, just like it has been done countless times in history. Instead, the British opted for war. However, this war was unlike any conflicts between European powers. It was a so-called punitive expedition, even though a *punishment expedition* would be the better term. It ended with many Ethiopians killed, a dead emperor, and a plundered and razed palace,[58] but with no annexation of land. Brendon explains that "anxiety about decline [. . .] was a root cause of British participation in the scramble for Africa—for which the Abyssinian adventure was a rehearsal".[59] However, he similarly states that "it was also a parade of power".[60] The overwhelmingly forceful and even for the time unnecessarily cruel handling of this hostage situation by the British indicated that the imperative for this war was neither economical nor militaristic in nature, but a simple display of might, power, and pride.

In 1883, the Ilbert Bill was proposed under the governing Viceroy George Robinson. Essentially, it intended to expand the rights of the Indian population by allowing them, with the necessary qualification, to also judge over British living in British-India.[61] Against the backdrop of the Indian Rebellion of 1857, sometimes also called the Sepoy Mutiny, the white, British population of India more than likely felt like this was an "assault on their privileged status".[62] In other words: an assault on British rule and their pride. Indeed, it

[55] Ferguson (2002: 185).
[56] Ferguson (2002: 166).
[57] Ferguson (2002: 145).
[58] Brendon (2008: 157).
[59] Brendon (2008: 155).
[60] ibid.
[61] Ferguson (2002: 166).
[62] ibid.

"was so violent that some called it a 'White Mutiny'".[63] In the end, the result was that "just two years after the White Mutiny, the first meeting of the Indian National Congress was held",[64] which is often regarded to as one of the starting points of the Indian independence movement.[65] What this seemingly shows is that in a way, the British likely accelerated the Indian independence by insisting on their privileged status above them, by preserving on their superiority and thus showing their *Hubris.*

Another showcase of what could be seen as a display of arrogance in the times of Britain's classical empire, are the proceedings of the acquisition of Egypt to the Empire. The opening of the Suez Canal (1869) was perceived primarily as a French threat (Frenchman were one of the major shareholders) to the ever so important trade with India,[66] for which the travel times were now significantly cut. Consequently, when the ruler of Egypt declared bankruptcy in 1875, which resulted in the selling of his shares, the British prime minister at the time acquired them.[67] When large-scale revolts broke out a couple of years later and alleged anarchy was looming over Egypt and thus British capital,[68] they struck. So it happened that the current prime minister back then, who opposed British entanglement in Egypt in the past,[69] "like others before and since, went to war in the name of peace",[70] annexing Egypt in 1882 (see Fig. 2).

But why could Britain's actions be seen as arrogant and perhaps prideful? It was of course on the dice that Britain would have had major interest in a canal, which shortened the way to her arguably most valuable colony by multiple thousand kilometers. However, it seems that the British stratagem for the Suez was that either they would have it or nobody else would. They simply could not allow any other power to control this globally important trade route. In turn, Britain's neighbors and colonial competitors vehemently begrudged the British acquisition of Egypt[71] and "in many ways, it was the real trigger for the African Scramble".[72] The fallout of the Egyptian ordeal would be without a doubt severe. Britain's adversaries, fueled by the fear of missing out, were perhaps becoming bolder.

Three examples have been brought forward to display how Britain, (mis)-guided by its own feeling of superiority, either internally or externally at times, acted with impunity and a sense of exceptionalism akin to gods on earth. While this might not have brought down

[63] ibid.
[64] ibid.: 170.
[65] ibid.: 171.
[66] Brendon (2008: 143).
[67] ibid.
[68] Brendon (2008: 167).
[69] Ferguson (2002: 195).
[70] Brendon (2008: 167).
[71] Darwin (2008: 309).
[72] Ferguson (2002: 195).

the Empire by itself, other factors were surely more directly involved in its later disintegration, *Hubris* had an underlying but profound effect on the trajectory the Empire took.

5.3 Rivalry and Competition

While the dichotomy between liberalism and imperialism possibly caused a form of atrophy from within the Empire and their arrogance caused irritation in the periphery and outside its borders, the rise of rivals and the comparative downturn, especially in economic and military terms, seems to be the most glaring symptom of decline.

As mentioned before, British neighbors and adversaries did not look kindly upon the British conquest of Egypt. In fact, it seems that the occupation of Egypt was the final drop of water that broke the dam and made the other European powers realize that unclaimed land (in general) became increasingly scarce. Additionally, it can be assumed that the formation of the German Empire in 1871 had changed the balance of power in Europe drastically as well as permanently. Thus, it is not surprising that it was mostly the Germans under chancellor Otto von Bismarck which caused the British anxiety and ultimately forced them to make concessions. These concessions were realized at the Congo Conference (1884/85) in Berlin.[73] Darwin argues that a major development in British foreign policy took place there by saying: "the British adopted the path of appeasement".[74] A similar assessment is given by Brendon, who states that "the very fact that European rivals could mount a challenge in Africa indicated that Britain's imperial ascendancy was under threat".[75]

Across the pond, the United States of America did not just eclipse the British economically but rather the entirety of Europe together. The American production of iron and steel a couple of years prior to World War One outweighed the combined production of Britain, France, and Germany.[76] Militarily, the German Empire did not just rival but indeed dwarf British capabilities. Prior to The First World War, the Germans would have been able to muster around 4.5 million men while the British could field around 750.000 men.[77] However, the fundamental difference between a land-based continental empire and an "amphibious empire"[78] should be contemplated. Another aspect which needs to be considered is the actual effectiveness of the armed forces. Since it is always a difficult matter to judge, one can use prior military engagements as points of orientation. For the British, the most recent, somewhat technologically equal and extensive conflict was the Second Boer

[73] Darwin (2008: 309).
[74] ibid.
[75] Brendon (2008: 178).
[76] Darwin (2008: 323).
[77] Ferguson (2002: 240).
[78] Gehler and Rollinger (2014: 1–29, 22).

War (1899–1902). A quarter of a million men fought against an improvised army which essentially consisted of untrained farmworkers.[79] This, the British did imperfectly, to say the least. Brendon determines that it "was a disastrous failure to recognise the changed nature of warfare",[80] while Darwin too concludes that "the South African War [...] exposed an embarrassing deficit in British military prowess".[81] Lastly, a profound change in British foreign policy needs to be considered in the context of rising rivals: the end of the so-called "splendid isolation". Presumably, the British recognized the changing nature in the balance of power and a coalition with Japan was signed in 1902. In 1904 and 1907 coalitions with France and Russia followed respectively.[82]

The rise of British rivals and thus the comparative decline of perceived British power has been showcased on the basis of firstly, their actions and concession-making in the context of the Congo Conference. Secondly, their comparative decline against rivals in terms of militaristic and economical measurements. And thirdly, their disastrous war in South Africa as well as their subsequent need to forge alliances for the first time in decades.

As already outlined in the beginning, this segment did not endeavor to compile a complete list of reasons for the debate on the onset of decline of the British Empire. The goal was rather to highlight the most noteworthy and consensual literary-historical reasons. First of all, it has been discussed that the dichotomy between liberalism at the center and imperialism in the periphery caused much trouble within the Empire. It most likely contributed considerably to the loss of the American colonies. At the same time, it also contributed to the massive, rapid, and at times unwanted acquisition of territory in India and Africa, causing British isolation and thus concessions on the world stage. Secondly, the transhistorical concept of Hubris within the context of British foreign and domestic policy has been examined. It has been shown that the British were capable and most importantly willing to launch an expedition with the sole reason of punishment in Abyssinia, thus demonstrating their unequaled strength but also pride to the rest of the world. The White Mutiny revealed that the inner tensions in India were not just originating from the Indian populace and their ever-growing demand for independence but rather again from the white ruling class who tried to defend their privileged status for as long as possible, guided by their own sense of superiority. This conflict, however, turned out to prove fatal to British rule in India, only accelerating the struggle for independence. British hubris also played a role in the handling of the opening of the Suez Canal and the subsequent conquest of Egypt, isolating Britain increasingly and forcing them to make concessions. Thirdly, the rise of Britain's rivals during the late 19th and early twentieth century has been showcased to demonstrate the gradual decline of the British Empire. Overshadowed by the United States in terms of economics and by the German Empire concerning the military, the British had

[79] Brendon (2008: 214).
[80] Brendon (2008: 217).
[81] Darwin (2008: 324).
[82] Darwin (2008: 324).

to seek alliances in an attempt to preserve the balance of power and their status as a leading power, especially after the disastrous Second Boer War. In the end, this segment tried to demonstrate that the immediate reasons for the disintegration of the British Empire like WWI, WWII, or even the post-war Suez Crisis were rather the figurative nails in the coffin, while the deep-rooted causes for decline of the British Empire itself started much earlier.

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The Decline of the American Empire

Hans-Jürgen Schröder

1 The Anti-Imperial Empire

The history of the United States of America is a history of expansion, territorial, economic and ideological expansion both in the Americas and overseas At first the continental expansion was in the foreground. During the Westward Expansion, the settlers referred to principles that were also used to justify an expansion beyond the continental borders: the quasi-natural law on the domination of North America (Manifest Destiny), divine providence, the spread of civilization as an ongoing mission and the idea of American exceptionalism, America as a unique nation morally superior to other nations. All of these principles became the ideological rationale for overseas expansion.

Another factor is the idea of an ever moving frontier. The expansion overseas was seen as a quasi-natural continuation of Westward Expansion. And in the second half of the nineteenth century, business representatives and politicians had concluded that the opening of overseas markets for American agricultural and industrial surplus products was an economic and political necessity. Economic overseas expansion should avoid economic depression at home and thereby stabilize the American political system. The Open Door Policy, equal access to foreign markets for all competing nations, was formulated as an American trade principle at the end of the nineteenth century. The Open Door Policy shows the already pronounced feeling of American superiority at that time. When trading on the basis of formal equality of treatment, American economic potential would prove superior.

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The economic rise of the USA was the basis of the American empire building. However, America did not see itself as an empire in the sense of a colonial empire. Referring to their anti-colonial war for independence against the British Empire, America has always seen itself as an anti-imperial empire. This anti-imperial position is a continuum of American foreign policy.

The founding of the United States, the rise to a hegemonic superpower and finally the fight against the decline of the Imperium Americanum are marked by a constant struggle against European and Asian empires. The war of independence against the British Empire at the end of the eighteenth century and the suppression of British influences in Latin America in the course of the nineteenth century were followed by the smashing of the remnants of the Spanish empire in the Spanish-American War of 1898. During the First World War, the USA fought for a new democratic world order. The result was the liquidation of the autocratic empires on the European continent and in Asia and the weakening of the British and French empires. During World War II, the United States liquidated three dictatorial empires in Europe and Asia that had fundamentally threatened the security of the United States and the rest of the world. During the Cold War, the struggle against the Soviet empire was central to American foreign policy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and a brief phase of a unipolar world order, the US sees itself increasingly threatened by the rising Chinese empire.

The United States emerged from the Second World War as the leading world power. America became the greatest imperial power of all times. It was based essentially on three pillars: overwhelming military power, economic domination, and unprecedented soft power. During the war, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had recalled the four freedoms as the foundation of peace order: "freedom of speech," "freedom of religion," "freedom from want," "freedom from fear." This was a promise to America and the world. Most of the world trusted him and see America as a model for their own development. The American way of life had an irresistible appeal. This applied to all areas. Everyday life and all facets of American culture. American films played a very special role as Hollywood became the symbol and the cornerstone of American soft power. This soft power was the basis of the American Informal Empire, which was eagerly accepted in most parts of the world. This manifests itself in terms such as "Empire by Invitation"[1] and "The Irresistible Empire."[2]

According to its anti-imperial tradition, the US was not ready to accept the existence of another empire. The result was a forty years Col War. The United States won the Cold War, when the Soviet empire imploded. But this was not for free as it has been argued. On his 90th birthday, George F. Kennan, the architect of containment, criticized sharply the America's uncompromising policy during the Cold War.

[1] Lundestad (1999).

[2] De Grazia (2005).

"But we did pay a great deal for it. We paid with 40 years of enormous and otherwise unnecessary military expenditures. We paid through the cultivation of nuclear weaponry to the point where the vast and useless nuclear arsenals had become (and remain today) a danger to the very environment of the planet. And we paid with 40 years of Communist control in Eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the damages of which to the structure of civilization in those countries we are only now beginning to observe. We paid all of this because we were too timid to negotiate."[3]

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the "unipolar moment" was proclaimed in America. The US was described as a "superpower" and as an "indispensable nation". However, the 1990s was only a brief episode of the American empire in this unipolar world.

2 The Unipolar Moment: An American Illusion

Right at the beginning of the twenty-first century it became clear that the unipolar moment was an illusion of Washington. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 were a dramatic turning point in American foreign and domestic policy in several ways. The terror of September 2001 made it clear that even the strongest military power in the world was exposed to attacks by non-state actors. Added to this are the medium and long-term effects of 9/11, which resulted from Washington's reactions to the fundamental challenges posed by the international terrorism. The former national security advisor Zbigniew Brzesinski succinctly summarized these consequences in his book Strategic Vision: "After 9/11, the vaguely defined 'war on terror' and its expansion in 2003 into a unilateral war of choice against Iraq precipitated a widespread delegitimation of US foreign policy even among its friends."[4] Both the Iraq war and the war in Afghanistan showed the limits of American military might.[5]

At the end of the 2000s the Great Recession of the years after 2007/2008 challenged American economic dominance and American capitalism. And given the economic and social inequality, the American Dream became less attractive. All three main pillars of American imperial policy, economic power, military power and soft power, were substantially weakened within a few years.

The transformation of the internal system and its implications for America's future global role are regularly analyzed by the National International Council (NIC), a center for midterm and long-term strategic thinking within the United States Intelligence Community. According to its official website it is the NIC's goal to provide policymakers with the best information without regard to whether the analytical judgements conform to current

[3] Kennan (1994).

[4] Brzezinski (2012: 44f).

[5] McCoy (2017: 96ff).

U.S. policy. Every four or five years since 1997 the NIC has published an unclassified strategic assessment of how key trends might shape the world over the next 20 years. Not least as a result of the Great Recession of 2007/2008 US decline became a central topic of the NIC assessments. In its 2008 report Global Trends 2025, the NIC acknowledged for the first time that America's global influence had begun to decline. Referring to historical experience the NIC predicted a loss of stability for the international system due to rising power rivalries.

"Historically, emerging multipolar systems have been more unstable than bipolar or unipolar ones. Despite the recent financial volatility—which could end up accelerating many ongoing trends—we do not believe that we are headed toward a complete breakdown of the international system, as occurred in 1914–1918 when an earlier phase of globalization came to a halt. However, the next 20 years of transition to a new system are fraught with risks. Strategic rivalries are most likely to revolve around trade, investments, and technological innovation and acquisition, but we cannot rule out a 19th century-like scenario of arms races, territorial expansion, and military rivalries."[6]

While the United States would "likely to remain the single most powerful actor", its "relative strength" will decline and "US leverage will become more constrained." The "international system will be stressed by the incomplete transition from the old to a still-forming new order."[7] The US "most likely will remain 'first among equals' among the other great powers in 2030 because of its pre-eminence across a range of power dimensions and legacies of its leadership role," the NIC added four years later. However, "with the rapid rise of multiple other countries, the "unipolar moment" is over and Pax Americana—the era of American ascendancy in international politics that began in 1945—is fast winding down."[8] The "fall of the dollar as the global reserve currency and substitution by another or a basket of currencies would be one of the sharpest indications of a loss of US global economic position, strongly undermining Washington's political influence too."[9]

In 2017 the National Intelligence Council predicted "rising tensions within and between countries. [...] An ever-widening range of states, organizations, and empowered individuals will shape geopolitics." Both, the era of American dominance and the rules-based international order were seen as drawing to a close. For better and worse, the emerging global landscape is drawing to a close an era of American dominance following the Cold War. It would be "much harder to cooperate internationally and govern in ways publics expect."[10]

In the face of this international situation, the NIC warned—without using the term overstretch—of the potential domestic consequences of an American international over

[6] National Intelligence Council (2008: vi).

[7] National Intelligence Council (2008: vi).

[8] National Intelligence Council (2012: 98).

[9] National Intelligence Council (2012: xii).

[10] National Intelligence Council (2017: ix).

commitment. While it would be tempting "to impose order on this apparent chaos," that "ultimately would be too costly in the short run and would fail in the long." Such a policy would require unacceptable resources, doing so "domestically would be the end of democracy, resulting in authoritarianism or instability or both." Although material strength would remain essential to geopolitical and state power, "the most powerful actors of the future will draw on networks, relationships, and information to compete and cooperate. This is the lesson of great power politics in the 1900s, even if those powers had to learn and relearn it."[11]

In its 2017 report the National Council stated, that "uncertainty is high around the world regarding Washington's global leadership role." Questions about the United States' role were seen to "center on what a country can afford and what its public will support in backing allies, managing conflict, and overcoming its own divisions. Foreign publics and governments will be watching Washington for signs of compromise and cooperation, focusing especially on global trade, tax reform, workforce preparedness for advanced technologies, race relations, and its openness to experimentation at the state and local levels. Lack of domestic progress would signal a shift toward retrenchment, a weaker middle class, and potentially further global drift into disorder and regional spheres of influence."[12]

Neither the Obama administration nor the Trump administration have drawn any discernible conclusions from the analyzed transformation of the international system. Obama reacted to the stated relative loss of America's global position by promising to overcome it.

He referred to "the indicators of crisis, subject to data and statistics." And he added: "Less measurable but no less profound is a sapping of confidence across our land, a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, that the next generation must lower its sights. Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious, and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America: They will be met."[13]

Although he repeatedly raised the issue of inequality, no effective action followed. Here, in the persistent inequality, is one reason why the populist Donald Trump was elected 45th President of the United States. What the NIC had warned about became reality with Trump: a threat to democracy through autocracy.

3 From Imperial Presidency to Autocracy

President Richard Nixon tried to establish what Arthur Schlesinger has called the Imperial Presidency.[14] When Nixon claimed to be above the law he was threatened by an impeachment. He resigned in August 1974 before the impeachment was launched. Four decades

[11] National Intelligence Council (2017: ix).

[12] National Intelligence Council (2017: 33f).

[13] Obama (2009).

[14] Schlesinger (1973).

later, another president, Donald Trump, put himself above the law and was not stopped. The 45th president succeeded in what was called "Unmaking the Presidency."[15]

Trump waged a war on American institutions, the courts, Congress, the press and on respect of truth. And Trump did not hesitate to express his regard for autocrats, such as Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban. When welcoming Orban at the White House he praised him for doing "a tremendous job in so many different ways," adding that he was "like me, a little bit controversial, but that's okay."[16]

Trump was able to continue his path to autocracy not least because the much-praised system of checks and balances largely failed. This was shown by the outcome of the impeachment initiated in December 2019 by the Democrat's majority of the House of Representatives. The impeachment failed in the Republican-dominated Senate and Trump was acquitted. As it turned out, Trump not only had the presidency firmly under control, but also the Republican Party and thus parts of the legislature. This apparently reinforced Trump's belief that he is above the law, as he had repeatedly claimed. The president's acquittal would imply an expansion of autocratic tendencies, as the authors of "Unmaking the Presidency" had warned.

Trump's autocratic tendencies must be seen in the context of the global decline of democracy that is documented in detail in a Freedom House survey "Freedom in the World 2020" evaluating 195 countries. "Democracy and pluralism are under assault," Freedom House, a nongovernmental, nonpartisan advocacy organization established in 1941, summed up its 2020 report.[17] While "dictators are toiling to stamp out the last vestiges of domestic dissent and spread their harmful influence to new corners of the world," many freely elected leaders, including even the chief executives of the largest democracies, the United States and India, are increasingly willing "to break down institutional safeguards." to pursue their populist agendas.

Developments in the United States "are of particular significance," it is argued, since "democracy advocates around the world have historically turned to the United States for inspiration and support." However, President Trump "has failed to exhibit consistent commitment to a foreign policy based on the principle of democracy and human rights" and "he has excused clear violations" by traditional security partners and he "has also given pass to tyrannical leaders" whom he hopes to woo diplomatically, including Vladimir Putin of Russia and Kim Jong-um of North Korea." This was seen by Freedom House in the context of the Trump administration's domestic agenda to erode democratic norms within the United States: Pressure on judicial independence or rhetorical attacks on the press and the the rule of law "undermine the country's ability to persuade other governments to defend core human rights and freedoms, and are actively exploited by dictators and demagogues."[18]

[15] Hennessey and Wittes (2020).

[16] Trump (2019).

[17] Freedom House (2020).

[18] Ibid.

Trumps illiberal agenda has repeatedly provoked comparisons with European developments between the two world wars. One commentator quoted a Trump administration insider who "conveyed that it was all a 'bit' reminiscent of the 'late' Weimar Republic. We know how that ended."[19]

Lloyd Green, an attorney in New York, who had served in the department of justice from 1990 to 1992, had the impression that "under Trump, America has gone a bit late Weimar."[20]

Christopher Browning, a University of North Carolina historian, put Trump's "suffocation of democracy" in a comparative perspective with reference to the so-called "Third Reich." Trump's "neutralization" of the free press is one example. Upon his appointment as chancellor, Hitler had created a new Ministry of People's Enlightenment and Propaganda. "In Trump's presidency, those functions have effectively been privatized in the form of Fox News."[21] Other authors stressed that Trump's autocracy should also be seen in the context of a longer term development. "Whether Donald J. Trump is a fascist, a post-fascist populist, an autocrat, or just a bumbling opportunist, the danger to democracy did not arrive with this presidency and goes well beyond" the 2020 presidential election.[22]

Trump's unmaking of the presidency had important implications for American foreign policy. Trump reduced foreign policy to a one-man show. In his decisions Trump largely followed his instincts, which explains many erratic steps. And the establishment of an autocratic presidency damaged American reputation abroad. "With a speed akin to the swiftness of 1989's rebellions, America's standing as a beacon of freedom has fallen."[23]

4 Is America Like Rome?

Since the founding of the United States of America, the Roman Empire has been an important point of reference for the assessment of American politics by historians, politicians and contemporary observers. Rome's presence in American thinking is manifested, for example, in a statue erected on the occasion of George Washington's 100th birthday. "Simultaneously toga-clad and betwigged" the first President of the United States "was portrayed as the heroic, if sartorially challenged, intersection point of twin republics: the Roman and the American."[24]

When drawing parallels between Rome and America, two factors are central. First, the view of the Roman Empire serves to illustrate the greatness of the United States using the

[19] Green (2020).
[20] Green (2020).
[21] Browning (2018).
[22] Albanese et al. (2020).
[23] Smale (2019).
[24] Holland (2019).

historical example: Pax Romana and Pax Americana, America the new Rome. However, the fate of Rome shows that even the greatest empire would ultimately be doomed. Could this also happen to the United States? And can this historical example serve as a guide for America's future? "Are We Rome?" is the title of a 2007 New York Times bestseller by Cullen Murphy, an American medieval historian and editor.[25] And Political Scientist Joseph S. Nye, the former Dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, referring to the decline debate asked: "Is America Like Rome?"[26] In addressing these questions the focus has been primarily on the internal decay of the Roman Empire as a cause for its decline: "Rome rotted from within when people lost confidence in their culture and institutions, elites battled for control, corruption increased, and the economy failed to grow adequately."[27]

President Trump's advent in the White House and the president's disruptive policies have intensified comparisons between Rome and the United States. Six months after Trump's inauguration the conservative commentator Bill Kristol likened the Trump presidency to the fall of the Roman Empire. In July 2017, he tweeted his extremely critical verdict on Trump: "The speed with which we're recapitulating the decline and fall of Rome is impressive. What took Rome centuries we're achieving in months."[28]

Two years later, the British-born American author Andrew Sullivan, calling Trump "Our Caesar", had the impression that the American Republic "already looks like Rome in ruins."[29] And he thought it would be "impossible to review the demise of the Roman Republic and not to be struck by the parallel dynamics in America in 2019." Americans "live, as the Romans did, in an economy of massive wealth increasingly monopolized by the rich." And Trump's "populist pathologies" had shown "how easily a culture that gave us Cicero could turn into the culture that gave us Caesar."

In a contribution to the New York Times Nobel laureate Paul Krugman also took a look at Roman history and its relevance to current events.[30] By comparing the Pax Romana and the Pax Americana he stressed the importance of soft power. "[. . .] our sort-of empire, like Rome's, has been held together mainly by soft power rather than violence." This "worked quite well. Not perfectly, of course, but we gave the world—and ourselves an era that was incredibly benign compared to the Thirty Years War that came before." However, Krugman saw the empire threatened from within.

"But now a babarian invasion seems likely to tear it all down. And the sad thing is that the barbarians rejecting the values that made America truly great aren't at the gates—

[25] Murphy (2007).
[26] Nye (2015: title of Chap. 5).
[27] Nye (2015: 71).
[28] Kristol (2017).
[29] Sullivan (2019).
[30] Krugman (2018).

they're inside the gates, in fact in the Oval Office, because they're basically home-grown (with an assist from Russsia, of course)."

A look at the fate of Rome is a powerful reminder of the fact that empires albeit their military might and economic superiority, are always threatened with decline if the domestic social and political base crumbles. This is exactly what is happening in the US and President Trump's policy is accelerating the American empire's decline.

5 Present at the Destruction: President Trump's Foreign Policy

5.1 "America First" Means America Alone

In the field of foreign policy, the Trump administration brought radical changes. This concerns methods, goals and the president's personal style. Trump was obsessed by the idea that the US was being exploited by other states and international organizations, both financially and economically. He believed he could counter this with a radical bilateralism and a protectionist tariff policy. In a kind of sledgehammer diplomacy, he terminated the US participation in numerous international treaties and organizations. This approach was supplemented by an aggressive trade policy. His dogmatic mercantilism was fed by the idea of reducing the American trade deficit with tariff wars. "America first" meant "America alone", as Constanze Stelzenmüller aptly commented.[31] In an almost morbid self-overestimation, Trump believed that he could avert America's decline with his radical bilateralism and ensure global dominance for the American empire. His ruthless aggressive one-man show made no distinction between adversaries and allies. This is evident from his attitude towards the European Union.

5.2 The European Union as Foe

During the election campaign Donald Trump repeatedly made hostile remarks towards the European Union. He praised the British Brexit vote and spoke of a likely collapse of the European Union. His confrontational attitude is also reflected in the fact that a potential candidate for the post of ambassador to the European recommended himself with anti-European statements. The academic, businessman and former diplomat Ted Malloch compared the European Union with the former Soviet Union. In an interview with the BBC he summarized his Euroscepticism as follows: "I had in a previous career a diplomatic post where I helped bring down the Soviet Union. So maybe there's another union that needs a little taming." He later added that Trump "doesn't like an organization that is supranational,

[31] Stelzenmüller (2018).

that is unelected, where the bureaucrats run amok, and is not frankly a proper democracy"[32] The man didn't get the job, but he set the tone for what was to come.

In the following months and years, Trump let his frustration on the European Union free rein. He repeatedly called the European Union "worse" than China. He also named the European Union a "foe" like Russia and China. When asked whether he first listed the European as a foe, trump answered: "No, I look at them all. Look, EU is very difficult [. . .] in a trade sense, they've really taken advantage of us and many of those countries are in NATO and they weren't paying their bills."[33]

In his crusade against Europe, Germany and chancellor Angela Merkel were 'ideal' targets. Germany is one of the most important European countries and Germany has large trade surpluses, especially with the United States. And Merkel had shown her reservations about Trump and his political agenda from the start. When congratulating Donald Trump on his election victory, Merkel felt compelled to set conditions for cooperation:

"Germany and America are bound by common values—democracy, freedom, as well as respect for the rule of law and the dignity of each and every person, regardless of their origin, skin color, creed, gender, sexual orientation, or political views. It is based on these values that I wish to offer close cooperation, both with me personally and between our countries' governments."[34]

When Merkel and Trump first met personally in March 1917, they could not disguise the differences that separated them on various issues such as trade and immigration. The New York Times emphasized the meeting's symbolism: "the great disrupter confronts the last defender of the liberal world order."[35]

Two months later, after discordant transatlantic meetings Angela Merkel had come to the conclusion that traditional alliances no longer were as steadfast as they once were.

"We have to know that we must fight for our future on our own, for our destiny as Europeans. I can only say that we Europeans must really take our fate into our own hand—of course in friendship with the United States, in friendship with Britain and as good neighbors wherever that is possible with other countries, even with Russia."[36]

Recurring rude attacks on Germany by Trump seemed to confirm Merkel's assessment. At the 2018 NATO summit Trump took aim at the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. He called Germany "a captive of Russia," because "they will be getting 60 to 70 percent of their energy from Russia." It wouldn't "make sense that they paid billions of dollars to Russia, and now we have to defend them against Russia."[37] In July 2020 Trump threatened to withdraw troops from Germany to punish Germany for low defence spending. In the

[32] Osborne (2017).

[33] Vazquez (2018).

[34] Faiola (2017).

[35] Landler (2017).

[36] Smale and Erlanger (2017).

[37] Trump (2018a).

summer of 2020, the British paper The Guardian summed up Trump's policy towards Germany and described it as a disaster.

"Donald Trump has declared war on Germany. In a manner of speaking Europe's most important country, potentially America's most valuable partner has in the mind of the president become an adversary. Of all Trump's many foreign policy disasters, this is perhaps the most significant."[38]

The Trump administration towards Europe has paced heavy strains on transatlantic relations and beyond. Calling the transatlantic relationship into question implies a dramatic weakening of the West. This found visible expression in the title of the 2020 Munich Security Conference: "Westlessness." The assertion made by foreign secretary Michael Pompeo at the conference that the US were pursuing a multilateral policy and that "the West is winning" was nothing but self-delusion.[39]

Despite the numerous verbal attacks by the American president, EU leaders have sought to ease the transatlantic tensions. "The list is long of things" that create the impression that the American leadership is "not very friendly", said Joseph Borrell, the high representative of the European Union. "There are the things they say, and then the things are. We are not foes. We share common values." In the end, Borrell added, transatlantic solidarity should be stronger than current disagreements.[40]

Such diplomatic conciliatory remarks do not alter the fact that the transatlantic relations had been severely damaged. This is the result of Trump's radical bilateralism. From his primitive perspective of international relations it was even logical to see the EU multilateral alliance as an opponent. Trump was obviously unable to assess the consequences for America. Such an assessment was given by secretary of defense James Mattis who left the government in response to Trump's radical bilateralism. In his letter of resignation Mattis communicated his "core belief" that "our strength as a nation is inextricably linked to the strength of our unique and comprehensive system of alliances and partnerships." The US could not serve its role as the "indispensable nation" without "maintaining strong alliances and showing respect for those alliances." Since China and Russia wanted to shape the world according to their authoritarian model, America and its allies had to use "all the tools of American power to provide for the common defence," and "to advance an international order that is most conclusive to our security, prosperity and values."[41]

President Trump wanted to "Make America Great Again". However, as his policy towards Europe clearly shows, he achieved the opposite. Trump brought down an important pillar of American foreign and security policy. The result was not a strengthening but a

[38] Kampfner (2020).

[39] Pompeo (2020).

[40] Tharoor (2020).

[41] Mattis (2018).

weakening of the American empire. This came at a time when the US was reliant on allies in the face of the increasing Chinese challenge.

6 The China Threat

6.1 The Chinese Empire

The rise of China is a central event for the international system of the twenty-first century. The great success of the Chinese economy is impressive. Within a few years, China has developed into the second largest economy. Forecasts predict that China will have overtaken the American economy by the middle of the century at the latest. China's share of the global gross domestic product (18.34% in 2020) is already greater than the share of the United States (15.9% in 2020). The economic rise is also due to massive government interventions. These are reflected in the numerous plans of the Chinese leadership.

In 2015 Beijing launched the 10-year plan "Made in China" (MIC 2025), an initiative to modernize China's industrial capabilities. It was the aim to improve China's position in high-tech industries and to make China less dependent on foreign technology. Two years later Xi announced a two-stage plan to become a "great modern socialist country" and a "leading power." In May 2020 president Xi announced the "dual circulation" strategy that seems to have the goal to partly reduce China's dependence on exports. Domestic economic circulation is being emphasized as a reaction to the changing international environment. And a long-term plan through 2035 to catch up with the US in the economic field faster than had originally been anticipated, was approved by the Chinese Communist Party in October 2020.[42]

China's economic strength is also the material basis for an active foreign policy. China's foreign policy has become more assertive in recent years. Above all, China wants to expand its hegemonic position in the South China Sea. However, Chinese expansion is not limited to Asia. Since the advent of president Xi Jinping China has pursued a global imperial policy, which is based primarily on China's economic potential. A visible expression of this global policy is a gigantic infrastructure project that Xi announced in 2013, the so-called New Silk Road. It consists of two elements: The overland Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road, and is now called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).[43]

[42] Tan and Kawate (2020).

[43] An excellent multi-perspective introduction into the One Belt, One Road initiative is Deepak (2018).

6.2 Trump's Trade War

During the presidential election campaign Trump had promised to reduce America's trade deficit. After the election Trump's simple-minded mercantilist view on foreign trade prompted him to launch a trade war against the world. China was the center of this trade war.

Between July 2018 and August 2019, the Trump administration announced plans to impose tariffs on more than 550 billion dollar of Chinese exports. China retaliated with more than 185 billion dollar of US goods. Trump succumbed to the illusion that unilateral tariffs would reduce the US trade deficit with China and cause American companies to bring manufacturing jobs back to America. Neither goal was achieved. Trump could only reach a limited trade deal. In the so-called Phase One Deal of 15 January 2020 China agreed to purchase additional US exports in the amount of 200 billion dollar. By the end of 2020 it had become clear, however, that China was falling short in its additional purchases of American exports. And a planned second trade agreement did not materialize. It is evident that Trump's trade war hurt America much more than China.[44]

"The aggressive trade policy has had a negative impact on the US economy as a whole, as the prices of goods subject to import tariffs have risen significantly," a German research institute commented. "In addition to macroeconomic losses [. . .] up to 75,000 jobs have been lost in the U.S. manufacturing sector as a result of the retaiatory tariffs and measures. Thus, the goal of the America First strategy of getting jobs back or protecting them has not yet materialized. The turmoil in trade policy has created upheavals and uncertainty in the financial markets."[45]

Other studies see the negative effects of the trade war as much more dramatic: Nearly 300.000 jobs were lost. The cost for US Gross National Product (GDP) are calculated between 0.3% and 0.7%, the cost for the US economy could be about 316 billion dollars. And Trump's major goal, to reduce the trade deficit with China, was not achieved. "More pain than gain," is the verdict of the Brookings Institute.[46]

Trump's trade war is unquestionably a disaster. It alienated allies. And the main goal of forcing the Chinese empire to change its economic and trading policies was not achieved. The United States had to finance the material burdens of the trade war. The trade war damaged America's reputation in the world and with it the American empire.

6.3 The Battle for Technological Supremacy

The trade war had also escalated into a tech war with China. It is essentially a fight for technological supremacy. In the beginning, the focus was on the Chinese technological

[44] Bown and Kolb (2021), Hass and Denmark (2020).

[45] Berenberg-Gossler et al. (2020).

[46] Hass and Denmark (2020).

company Huawei. In his book Trump Vs. China, the 50th speaker of the House of Representative from 1995 to 1999, addressed the challenges of Huawai's 5G network technology for the United States. He described the G5 technology as "a critical matter of national security. [. . .] The state or entity that controls 5G will define the essential digital infrastructure of the future. Consequently, if an aggressive totalitarian actor controls the technology globally, it will have dangerous implications for the United States. Additionally, 5G is essential for developing the economic and technology spheres of America. The US has the opportunity to lead the world in this emerging technology [. . .] If we fail to implement this all-of-government and all-of-society effort to deploy 5G securely and efficiently, we are risking a totalitarian Chinese Communist Party-controlled technological future."[47]

The Trump administration's campaign against Huawei may ultimately be successful to the extent that numerous governments give in to the pressure from the United States and partially or completely exclude the Chinese group from building up the G5 infrastructure. At the same time, America's diplomatic and technological weakness is also evident here. The Trump administration couldn't block Huawei's G5 technology worldwide. In addition, Washington could not offer a comparable alternative, because an American G5 standard was not yet available. Semiconductor chips are a different story. Here, the US is the technology leader and it can withhold a much-needed technology from China. The Trump administration's tech war has undoubtedly put China under considerable pressure.

The Chinese leadership has not attempted to downplay US technological leadership, particularly in the field of semiconductor chips. On the contrary: The Global Times, a mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), acknowledged that the US being "firmly in control" of the semiconductor industry, "has controlled the commanding heights of the technological war against China." Undoubtedly the US "will abuse this advantage further." The imposition of US restrictions on exports to China's largest chipmaker SMIC was seen as "the new battleground" after the US "all-out siege against Huawei to paralyze China's high-tech industry." As a consequence, "China will need to control all research and production chains of the semiconductor industry, and rid itself of being dependent on the US." From Huawei to SMIC the Chinese people should see for themselves "that we are facing a protracted battle against high-tech suppression led by the US." The Global Times' editorial board called for large-scale innovations drives "to fully unleash the creativity of the Chinese people." In order to "smash US attempts to strangle China's technological development", it was argued, the Chinese people need to prepare for a "new long march."[48]

While Washington can put China under pressure, the trade war could prove to be a double-edged sword. American pressure is forcing China to accelerate technological innovation. And given the close ties between the two economies, the tech battle also has negative effects for the US economy.

[47] Gingrich and Christensen (2019: 114).

[48] Global Times editorial (2020).

The technological Sino-American rivalry also manifests itself in the field of nuclear energy, on which China is poised to overtake the United States by 2030.The US still leads in terms of capacity in operation. But the trend signals a future Chinese leadership. Beijing has 11 new reactors under construction with more than 40 in the planning. "America is falling behind," said Maria Korsnick, the president of the U.S. Nuclear Energy Institute. And she drew Attention to the geopolitical implications. Chinese and Russian "efforts to promote nuclear power internationally are core parts of their foreign policy." "If the US loses its leading role in nuclear technology," she warned, "this is far more than a technological issue. It means a decline in foreign policy influence in the international system."[49]

7 Preparing for a Post-Dollar World?

For more than half a century the dollar was the undisputed and dominant currency of the world. Its "Exorbitant Privilege"[50] resulted from the dominant global role of the American economy. The centrality of the American financial system was also a source of global leadership. The dominance of the dollar was a key element in securing the American empire. However, during the last decade, events like the financial crisis of 2007/09 and the Great Recession have raised concerns about the sustainability of the dollar's strength. More recently, the global economic crisis triggered by the pandemic, the American-Chinese confrontation and the Trump administration's failure in the fight against the pandemic have prompted numerous commentators to put the future significance of the dollar up for discussion. In this context, the journalist and author Rana Fohoohar[51] even raised the question: "Are we entering a post-dollar world?"

There are undoubtedly numerous factors that could weaken the dollar's position in the long run: activities by foreign countries directed against the dominance of the dollar or elements of American foreign policy such as weaponizing the dollar as an instrument of economic sanctions.

7.1 Economic Sanctions: The Risk of Overuse

In the past two decades, economic sanctions have become an increasingly important instrument of American foreign policy. This is particularly true of the Trump administration. Sanctions are seen as a tool to influence other states' behaviour, when diplomacy is deemed to be ineffective and when military intervention is regarded to be too risky. Sanctions are not a specifically American foreign policy instrument. But due to the

[49] Cited by Fukuoka (2020).

[50] Eichengreen (2011).

[51] Foroohar 2020.

country's position as the center of the world's financial system American economic sanctions have a particularly far-reaching impact. Individuals who are subject to American sanctions are de facto excluded from the dollar-dominated financial system. Trump has used economic sanctions particularly frequently as an instrument of his foreign policy. However, this raised the question of whether an intensified use of economic sanctions would ultimately undermine the intended effect as some experts argue.

In 2016, the then secretary of the treasury Jack Lew,[52] warned against an excessive use of sanctions, "the risks of overuse" as he called it. "Just as with the other ways that the United States projects power, imposing sanctions also involves costs and risks." Therefore, sanctions should not be used lightly, since they can "strain diplomatic relationships, introduce instability into the global economy, and impose real costs on companies here and abroad." In addition they would carry the risk of retaliation. "Actions that trigger U.S. sanctions must constitute a significant threat to our national security, foreign policy, or economy."

However, it would be a mistake to think that sanctions are "low-cost." Here Lew also addressed the risks of so-called secondary sanctions, which "threaten to cut off foreign individuals or companies from the U.S. financial system" even "if none of that activity touches the United States directly." They might be viewed even by close allies as "extra-territorial attempts to apply U.S. foreign policy to the rest of the world." Lew warned that "sanctions overreach" could ultimately drive business activity from the U.S. financial system." While there were still many factors that will continue to make the United States the most attractive financial system in the world, "our central role must not be taken for granted." The "more we condition use of the dollar and our financial system on adherence to U.S. foreign policy, the more the risk of migration to other currencies and other financial systems in the medium-term grows." Sanctions had become "a powerful way to protect U.S. national security interests." But Washington should remain vigilant to maintain a "high bar" for imposing sanctions. They should only be used to address "significant threats to our national security, foreign policy, or economy, and only when the costs and benefits have been carefully evaluated." Secondary sanctions should only be used "in the most exceptional circumstances."[53]

Henry M. Paulson, who served as secretary of the treasury from 2006 to 2009, also warned against excessive use of sanctions. Washington should be "mindful" that unilateral sanctions are not free of cost. "Weaponizing the dollar could energize both allies and foes to develop alternative reserve currencies."[54] This is exactly what has already been happening for several years. The euro and the yuan might serve as examples.

The creation of the euro in 1999 also had the goal to make the European Union less dependent on the almighty dollar. While the "worldwide leading of the US was in fact not

[52] Lew (2016). See also Lew and Nephew (2018).

[53] Lew (2016).

[54] Paulson (2020).

disputed," its supremacy was "called into question," as Michael Gehler, Director of the Historical Institute of the University Hildesheim and Jean Monnet Chair of Comparative European History and Europe's Integration, put it, "but its supremacy was called into question." He underscores the euro's global significance by aptly characterizing it as a "world currency."[55]

Two decades after the launching of the euro, the common single currency is established as a success story. This is documented in the economic statistics. After the dollar (60% in 2019) the euro is the second favourite currency of global central bank reserves (20% in 2019).[56] The proportion of international payments made in euros and US dollars is roughly equal. And the euro is the world's second favorite currency for borrowing and lending.

The European Union's longstanding efforts to improve the international role of the euro had been intensified also in response to the policy of the Trump administration. Trump's rude behavior during and after the G7 summit in Charlevoix, Canada in June 2018 prompted numerous European politicians to ask for further strengthening the euro. "Promoting the international role of the euro was one answer to that political moment," said Martin Selmayr, the then secretary-general of the European Commission. Jean-Claude Juncker, the then president of the European Commission, promised to make the euro "play its full role on the international scene."[57] These announcements were followed by detailed plans, which are reflected in numerous memoranda of the European Commission. Strengthening the international role of the euro is seen as "both the logical continuation and a new frontier in the Economic and Monetary Union overall agenda." Competition with the dollar was only indirectly addressed by stating that a strengthened euro "will also make the international economy less vulnerable to shocks linked to a single dominant currency."[58] More recently, on 21 July 2020, the European Union further improved the international relevance of the euro by agreeing on a Next Generation EU (NGE) fund of 750 billon euro establishing de-facto a pan-European fiscal policy.[59]

7.2 Chinese-Russian Drives to Dethrone the Dollar

De-dollarization has been an important goal for China and Russia since 2014 when they began to intensify their economic cooperation. Russia's annexation of Crimea resulted in sanctions from the West and replacing the dollar in trade settlements became necessary for Moscow to undermine the impact of American sanctions against Russia. Their cooperation,

[55] Gehler (2020: 32).

[56] Statistics in: European Central Bank (2020).

[57] As quoted by Sandbu (2019).

[58] Quotations in: European Commission (2018).

[59] On the evolution of NGE and its political dimensions see Gehler (2021: 73ff).

it has been reported, could even lead to a "financial alliance."[60] The statistics reflect significant progress over the last several years. In 2015 about 90% of bilateral Chinese-Russian transactions were conducted in dollars, by 2019 this figure was drastically reduced to about 50%. In the first quarter of 2020, the dollar's share even fell below 50%. In its efforts to isolate Russia's economy from US interference, the Russian central bank has also reduced its holdings of US Treasuries in its international reserves. The Yuan's share of Russia's foreign exchange reserves rose from 5% to 15%. Similarly, the People's Bank of China could be tempted to reduce its dollar-denominated assets and increase its holdings of alternative assets such as the euro or the yen.

In China the policy of de-dollarization gained further momentum after the Trump administration imposed high tariffs on Chinese goods worth several hundreds of billions of dollars. Beijing is currently undertaking numerous steps to internationalize its currency also by further opening the Chinese economy for the influx of foreign capital. The expected changes in China's exchange regime "are likely to trigger a significant shift in the international monetary order," and could give the dollar "a painful blow," as Harvard economist Kenneth Rogoff noted.[61] China's cryptocurrency policy has also to be seen in the context.

7.3 The Cryptocurrency Challenge

The rise in popularity of cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and Ethereum had long been regarded as a bubble caused primarily by irrational speculators. However, this interpretation underestimates their increasing economic and geopolitical significance. More recently, cryptocurrencies are gaining ground as a new means of payment. Digital currency advocates argue that cryptocurrencies, which are largely unregulated, are better suited for the current geopolitical shifts toward a more multilateral world. Also, digital currencies are increasingly seen as a "digital gold," a "safe haven in tumultuous times", and a hedge against potential decline of the dollar.[62] China, as part of its de-dollarization policy, is preparing to issue a central bank digital yuan which may have a great potential to impact the global economy. Most central banks around the globe have not yet decided whether to issue digital currencies.

It is not yet possible to assess the effects of cryptocurrencies on the dollar's standing. But there are clear indications that the increasing use of cryptocurrencies could challenge the dollar in the future. In the long term bitcoin might even be interpreted "as an early signal of a new world order in which the US and the dollar will play a less important

[60] Simes (2020).

[61] Rogoff (2021).

[62] Sharma (2020).

role" Bitcoin's rise should at least serve as a warning. "For now, the bitcoin boom may best be viewed as a canary in the coal mine," as one commentator put it.[63]

7.4 Debts and Deficits

In assessing the future development of the dollar, the American budget and monetary policies could also play an important role. The FED's ultra-loose monetary policy has caused budget deficits to grow. These budget deficits could result in larger external deficits and weaken the dollar's attractiveness as a reserve currency, as could a surge of inflation. Rising trade deficits pose a further risk. Finally, Washington's debt policy has another weak point. The reliance upon foreign governments and foreign private investors to fund the American national deficits.

7.5 American System and Geopolitics

However, it is not just economic data that determine the international standing of the dollar. Political and geopolitical factors also have a major influence. Former federal reserve chief Paulson pointed out the importance of social and political developments within the United States. The United States "must maintain an economy that inspires global credibility and confidence," he warned. "The dollar's status is a proxy for the fundamental soundness of the American political system." To safeguard the dollar's position, the American economy "must remain a model of success and for emulation." But this "requires a political system capable of implementing policies that will allow more Americans to flourish and achieve economic prosperity."[64]

The London Economist recently recalled the geopolitical implications of the dollar. It was not just America's economic superiority, it is argued with reference to the work of Barry Eichengreen of the University of Berkley, Arnaud Mehl and Livia Chitut of the European Central Bank,[65] that "put the dollar at the center of the post-war order, but its unrivalled geopolitical might as well, which it used to reforge an integrated global economy." So the dollar's role does not only depend on America's economic data, "but it is bound up in the geopolitical order it has built." The dollar's "greatest threat is not the appeal of the euro or yuan" but the Trump administration's "flagging commitment to the alliances and institutions that fostered peace and globalisation for more than 70 years." At present, the role of the dollar does not seem to be endangered. "A more fractitious and

[63] Foroohar (2021).

[64] Paulson (2020).

[65] Eichengreen et al. (2017).

hostile world," however. "could spell the end of the dollar's privileged position—and much more besides."[66]

7.6 The Dollar and Empire

There is no question that the dollar is currently still the dominant currency. The dollar enjoys three major advantages: the ability to maintain its value, the size of the American economy and open and liquid financial markets. So far no other country has been able to compete in these fields. But it would be "foolish," Harvard economist Jeffrey Frankel commented, "that it's written in stone that the dollar will forever be unchallenged as number one international currency."[67]

Indeed, the dollar already faces fundamental challenges: external factors and geopolitical shifts. The sum of the challenges mentioned above suggests that the TINA effect (there is no alternative) is nearing its end. At first sight it might be premature the answer the question whether we are entering a post-dollar world in the affirmative. But numerous symptoms show that the dollar's decline has already begun. It is an irony that the dollar's dominance, and namely the weaponizing of the dollar could contribute to its decline. This will have an important impact on the future of the American empire. The dominance of the dollar was a key element in building and securing the American empire. And the dollar's decline is a clear signal of the decline of the American empire.

8 The New World of Energy: The US an Energy Superpower?

Oil has always been an important factor in American foreign policy. Access to the world's oil reserves had to be secured politically, diplomatically and militarily in the interest of American prosperity and security. The development of oil and gas reserves within the U.S. which has been accelerated in recent years, has gradually reduced dependence on oil imports. When oil self-sufficiency was realized in 2020, Trump stated with pride: "the United States of America is now the number one energy superpower anywhere in the world. [. . .] We will never again be reliant on hostile foreign suppliers."[68]

This opened up geopolitical perspectives for US foreign policy. Now, the United States was in a position to impose sanctions on oil-producing countries such as Iran, Russia and Venezuela without putting at risk its own oil supplies. These geopolitical dimensions are also reflected in the partial U.S. military retreat from the Middle East. American self-

[66] Free exchange (2020).
[67] Frankel (2019).
[68] Trump (2020).

sufficiency in the energy sector has undoubtedly created new opportunities for foreign and security policy.

In the debate about the future prospects of the American empire, however, it must be doubted whether the energy superpower status will also be available to the US as an instrument of power politics in the medium and long term. Most countries are determined to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels for reasons of climate protection. A new age might have begun: electrification. And here China is the most important global player. It brought the price of solar panels down far enough to stimulate world energy markets with China being the dominant supplier. China produces 70% of solar panels and roughly 50% of wind turbines. It also controls the supply chains for lithium-ion batteries. And the Chinese leadership seems determined to maintain its leading role. One might see it as an irony that China—the world's largest importer of crude oil and gas and a foreign oil dependency ratio of 70%—is driving the global green energy revolution.

In this changing global environment America's energy superpower status that is primarily based on fossil energy could prove to be unsustainable. With a traditional energy approach, the U.S. could fall behind in the global competition for leadership in the world energy market. While president Trump makes fun of windmills, China is investing trillions of dollars in renewable energy. For now, it looks like China is winning the global race to shape a new low-carbon world. In September 2020, a few weeks before the U.S. formal withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement, Xi reaffirmed the Chinese "green" energy leadership when he surprisingly announced that China would be carbon neutral by 2060.

Despite important innovations, the U.S. is behind in the field of renewable energies. "In the new energy world Mr Trump's superpower looks like an also-ran," as the London Economist has commented.[69] Given the shifts in the global energy markets, an energy superpower cannot solely rely on Big Oil. "U.S. energy strength also depends on investing in tomorrow's new energy technologies" and in addressing both climate change and environmental protection."[70] Only then will Washington be able to establish and maintain a global energy dominance as a strategic, economic and foreign policy element. Here, however, Washington will be in fierce competition with China's global goals, some of which have already been achieved. While Washington is primarily relying on Oil and Gas, China is heavily investing in new technologies. By maximizing its electrostatic power China is poised to create conditions "that let its companies supply electric power in a large number of countries."[71] It has been suggested that such "infrastructure diplomacy" might "prove as important to Chinese power in the 21st century as the protection of sea lanes was to American power in the 20th. If it uses it deftly, the energy transition could bring it advantages beyond any achievable with rigs, derricks and pipelines."[72]

[69] Economist Briefing (2020).

[70] Bordoff (2017).

[71] Economist Briefing (2020).

[72] Ibid.

9 The Meltdown of American Soft Power

9.1 US Image Abroad in Decline

A country's image abroad is an important, albeit often neglected, element of soft power. This image is primarily determined by the respective country and first of all by its leadership. As for the United States, it is first of all the president who shapes the American image. This is shown by the fluctuations in American prestige abroad during the first three presidents of the twenty-first century. The low approval ratings for George W. Bush were followed by a significant rise for Barack Obama. Since the election of Donald J. Trump various polls have been reporting a steep decline.

Within a few months after his inauguration Donald Trump has had a major impact of how the world sees the United States. According to a Pew Research Center survey in 37 countries, a media of only 22% expressed confidence in Trump to do the right thing in international affairs.[73] This steep decline in America's ratings stands in contrast to the final years of the Obama presidency, when a media of 64% expressed confidence in Obama's foreign policy.

Two years after Trump's inauguration, the president's international ratings remained low. Across the 25 nations polled by the Pew Research Center a median of only 27% said they had confidence in President Trump to do the right thing in world affairs. 70% said they had no confidence in him. According to the poll the international public placed more faith not only in French President Macron (46%) and German Chancellor Merkel (52%) but also in the Russian and Chinese presidents Putin (30%) and Xi Jinping (34%).[74] Eliot S. Cohen pointed out the foreign policy implications of these survey results:

"To a stunning degree the Trump administration has diminished the sense of U.-S. constancy that has been indispensable to the postwar liberal order. The effects of that lost credibility are intangible for now, but they will become manifest in the event of a crisis when, for instance, U.S., allies do not answer a call for help or, worse, when they choose to appease or accommodate rival powers such as China or Russia."[75]

During Trump's fourth year in the White House America's reputation had declined even further among many American allies. This is shown by a 13 nation Pew Research Center Survey published in September 2020: "In several countries, the share of the public with favorable view of the U.S. is as low as it has been at any point since the Center began polling on this topic two decades ago."[76] The survey confirmed the trend of low ratings for Trump throughout his presidency. Belgium and Germany had the most negative assessments where only 9% respectively 10% said they had confidence in the president

[73] Wike et al. (2017).

[74] Wike et al. (2018).

[75] Cohen (2019: 142).

[76] Wike et al. (2020).

to do the right thing in world affairs; the highest ratings were in Japan (25%) and Australia (23%). The publics surveyed also saw Trump more negatively than other world leaders, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Macron and British Prime Minster Boris Johnson. Ratings for "no confidence" in Russian President Vladimir Putin (73%) and Chinese President Xi Jinping (78%) were "overwhelmingly negative," although not as negative as those for President Trump (83%).

The Journalist and author Edward Luce has succinctly summarized these survey results: "The US brand is in measurable freefall." During the Trump administration "US politics has generated into a macabre shadow of its former self. [. . .] China is now eating America's dinner and eyeing tomorrow's breakfast."[77] The president's behaviour at international conferences was an important factor for the decline of America's reputation.

9.2 A President Laughed at

There are numerous reports that foreign politicians behind Trump's back repeatedly made fun of him. During the December 2019 NATO summit a video surfaced showing other world leaders including Boris Johnson, Justin Trudeau and Emmanuel Macron joking about Trump. This prompted Trump to leave the summit of "disunity" early.[78] "The president is a laughing stock," the New York Times commented, "mocked for his buffoonery, ignorance and bluster. In just a few days abroad, he made 21 false statements, a microcosm of his presidency."[79]

On another occasion, Trump was laughed at on the open stage; at the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018, where he gave a speech to affirm American "sovereignty", rejecting "global governance, control and domination."[80] When at the beginning of his speech Trump boasted that in "less than 2 years, my administration has accomplished more than almost any administration in the history of our country," he generated audible guffaws among the assembled statesmen from all over the world. The transcript of the speech recorded "laughter" three times.

9.3 China Goes Hollywood

"For all the talk of American decline there's one thing we still make better than anyone on the planet: movies." This was proudly proclaimed on the occasion of the 2012 Academy Awards by Stephen Galloway, formerly editor of The Hollywood Reporter and currently

[77] Luce (2020).
[78] Lyons and Wintour (2019).
[79] Egan (2019).
[80] Trump (2018b).

Dean of Chapman University's Film School. Despite globalization's harmful effects on the US textile, automotive, and computer industries, "for movies it's still very much America's world." He quoted the French-Canadian film director Philippe Falardeau as saying that if Hollywood could get the best and brightest talents from abroad, no matter how far the rest of America declines, Hollywood will remain untouchable."[81]

However, this assessment has proven to be too optimistic. Since the beginning of the 2010s, Hollywood has faced numerous problems that threaten its global leadership. Rising production costs, declining demand at the box office, and growing dependence on foreign markets with China poised to become the world's largest film market, and increasing Chinese influence on Hollywood studios.

In a report of October 2015 the U.S.- China Economic and Security Review Commission drew attention to an increasing Chinese influence on Hollywood film production.

"Hollywood relies on China's film market for revenue, but the process to get films into China is arduous due to strict and opaque regulation on film imports. [. . .] As a result of these regulations Hollywood filmmakers are required to cut out any scenes, dialogues, and themes that may be perceived as a slight to the Chinese government. With an eye toward distribution in China, American filmmakers increasingly edit films in anticipation of Chinese censors' many potential sensitivities."[82]

The report further stated that Hollywood "has increasingly chosen to appease Chinese censorship faced with the difficult choice between tailoring its content for China or losing billions of dollars in revenues." The studios efforts "to comply with the demands of Chinese officials" had already given "China disproportionate leverage over the production of American films."[83]

A more detailed report on the ways in which Chinese censors have affected and influenced Hollywood and the global filmmaking industry was published in August 2020 by PEN America, a non-profit literary and human rights group headquartered in New York.[84] The 94 page study finds that primarily three factors give China "substantial leverage" over Hollywood decision-makers. Firstly, the fast growing theatre-going market is seen by Hollywood studios as "a prerequisite for their movies' financial success." Secondly, China's censorship system means that the Chinese censors "hold all the keys to such market access." Thirdly, the Chinese government has sent "a clear message to the filmmaking world, that filmmakers who criticize China will be punished, but that those who play ball with its censorship strictures will be rewarded."[85] This means that censors in Beijing can decide whether a Hollywood movie will be profitable or not.

[81] Galloway (2012).

[82] O'Connor and Armstrong (2015: 3).

[83] Ibid. 12.

[84] PEN America (2020).

[85] Ibid. 6.

Richard Gere, the American actor and producer, warned about the dangers of Chinese influence on American film productions, when he appeared before the US Senate: Chinese censorship and the American film studios' desire to access China's market, "can lead to self-censorship and overlooking social issues that great American films once addressed."[86]

In the context of the intensified Sino-American confrontation, this growing influence of China on the American film industry has brought leading politicians from the Trump administration to the scene. Attorney general Barr took aim at Hollywood companies accusing them for kowtowing to Chinese intervention. "Many more scripts never see the light of the day because writers and producers know not to test the limit as Chinese government censors don't need to say a word because Hollywood is doing their work for them." Barr called this "a massive propaganda coup for the Chinese Communist Party."[87]

However, it is much more than a Chinese propaganda coup. It means that a key element of American soft power is on decline with significant geopolitical consequences, which journalist Janan Ganesh recently recalled. "America owed its mastery of the last century to raw tonnage of armaments, yes, but also to its dominance of the moving image. More than a decade before D-Day or Bretton Woods, the US had a psychic hold on much of the world. [. . .] "No empire has ever had an asset quite like it. But the past tense in that sentence seems apt. [. . .] If the sun is setting on Hollywood, it is setting on a certain kind of American power."[88]

10 The Black Swan Has Landed: The Pandemic as Turning Point?

In its report of December 2012 the National Intelligence Council had added numerous caveats to its analysis and projections on global trends. The first of these reservations referred to the incalculable disruptive dangers that a so-called black swan could pose in the form of a global pandemic.[89]

And that's exactly what happened. One such swan landed in China at the beginning of 2020. The pandemic, which spread rapidly around the world, became a central problem in world politics. One year on it is possible to take a first look at the global political, economic and social effects of the pandemic that will characterize the coming years:

Inequalities between states and within their societies have been dramatically exacerbated by the pandemic. The consequence is global instability.

Liberal democracy is further besieged by the spread of demagogic autocracies using the pandemic as a pretext for intensifying state repression. And the rise of populism in the West has undermined the credibility of liberal democracy.

[86] Gere (2020: 9).

[87] Barr (2020).

[88] Ganesh (2020).

[89] National Intelligence Council (2012: xi).

International indebtedness is not a new phenomenon, but a development over the last few decades. But the pandemic has significantly increased debt levels in both the private and public sectors.

The digital transformation has accelerated dramatically since the beginning of the pandemic.

Intensified Chinese-American confrontation.

The collapse of presidential leadership. (That was possibly decisive for Trump's defeat in the presidential election.)

The factors mentioned are not caused by the pandemic, but the pandemic is accelerating developments that were already in place before 2020. The accelerating and interactions of these already existing trends have unleashed dramatic geopolitical dynamics that had not been anticipated by either political or scientific projections. This is of crucial importance in assessing the political, economic, military and moral position of the USA in the international system.

What we see is the power struggle between two global empires. We are witnessing the confrontation of two different dynamics—the one empire is in decline, but it is not ready to accept this decline. Rather, it claims global hegemony. The other empire also derives a global leadership role from its position of economic, technological and military power, which has increased dramatically since the beginning of the twenty-first century. And China is seizing every opportunity to exploit any weaknesses of the West and especially of the US for its imperial goals. That's what happened during the presidential transition.

11 America's Decline on Display: The Presidential Transition

11.1 The Assault on Congress: A Day of Infamy

Trump's struggle against American democracy did not end with Joe Biden's election victory. Rather, Donald Trump continued his attacks on American democratic institutions and traditions during the transition. He was not ready to accept his electoral defeat, described the election as rigged and tried to overturn the election results in over l50 lawsuits. When he failed in the courts, he resorted to violence. On 6 January 2021, the day Congress met to certify the November elections results, armed Trump supporters incited by the president, stormed the Capitol. Five people died in the riot.

When Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt called this "a day of infamy". Eight decades on America was attacked from within. Another "day of infamy", as numerous observers commented. Yale University historian Timothy Snyder called the assault on Congress "The American Abyss."[90] And for Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, the events of January

[90] Snyder (2021).

6 even seemed to mark the end of the American Century. "We are seeing images that I never imagined we would see in this country—in some other capital yes, but not here," Haass tweeted on the day of the riot. "No one in the world is likely to see, respect, fear, or depend on us in the same way again. If the post American era has a start date, it is almost certainly today."[91] A few days later Haass again emphasized the riot's implications for America's standing in the world. "A post-American world," he wrote in a Foreign Affairs article, "is coming sooner than generally expected—less because of the inevitable rise of others than because of what the United States has done to itself."[92] Even before the attack on the Capitol, the economic historian Harold James, a man who doesn't comment lightly, described the domestic political crisis in drastic terms. In his article "Late Soviet America"[93] he draws comparisons with the dissolution of the Soviet Union:

"In fact, many aspects of America's current *annus horribilis* recall the final years of the Soviet Union, starting with the intensification of social and political conflict. In the Soviet case, long-suppressed ethnic rivalries and competing national aspirations quickly bubbled to the surface, pushing the entire country toward violence, secession, and disintegration. In the US, Trump's response to nationwide protests against racism, police brutality, and inequality has been to stoke further the country's historic civil divide. And like the statues of Lenin during the collapse of the Soviet empire, statues of Confederate leaders are being toppled just about anywhere."

The events of January 6, 2021 also put an end to the US claim that the American system is a model for the whole world. There was not much left "to celebrate American greatness as a shining example to the world," as stated in the National Security Strategy of 2017. Here it was also promised to leave our children and grandchildren a Nation that is stronger, better, freer, prouder, and greater than ever before."[94]

The assault on Congress sent shock waves around the world that prompted immediate statements from leading politicians.[95] Democratic allies voiced deep concern and took the opportunity to publicly distancing themselves from Donald Trump. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted: "Disgraceful scenes in U.S. Congress. The United States stands for democracy around the world and it is now vital that there should be a peaceful and orderly transfer of power." And he told journalists that he thought "what President Trump has been saying about that has been completely wrong, and I unreservedly condemn encouraging people to behave in the disgraceful way they did in the Capitol." New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern let the world know that "Our thoughts are with everyone who is devastated as we are by the events of today. I have no doubt that democracy will prevail." German chancellor Angela Merkel said that the images from Washington made her "angry"

[91] Haass (2021a).

[92] Haass (2021b).

[93] James (2020).

[94] National Security Strategy (2017: 55).

[95] Statements of world leaders as compiled by Reals (2021).

and "sad". But she added that she was "sure U.S. democracy is stronger" than the rioters at the Capitol. And German foreign minister Heiko Maas correctly predicted that the Washington riots would be exploited for propaganda purposes by democracy's enemies. This is what happened.[96]

Autocratic and dictatorial regimes around the world like Russia, Iran and China that had been identified as America's adversaries by President Trump, were quick to comment the storm on Congress with schadenfreude. Konstantin Kosachev, the chairman of Russia's Federation Council Committee on International Affairs, said that the events in Washington "showed that American democracy was limping on both legs and the United States lost the right to impose a course on other countries."[97]

The Chinese propaganda paper Global Times, referring to statements by Li Haidong, a professor at the Institute of International Relations of the China Foreign Affairs University at Beijing, stated that for a long time "the US has touted itself the model of democracy, but what happened in the Capitol is a blow to its international reputation. [. . .] the US also lost moral high ground with countries it intends to interfere in. Any country that wanted to learn from the US would think twice."[98] Beijing, however, did not limit itself to propaganda. The Chinese government also took every opportunity to further advance its geopolitical agenda.

11.2 China's Geopolitical Gains

While the United States was engaged in domestic political disputes, Beijing also took advantage of the foreign policy vacuum created by the turbulent transition to advance its geopolitical agenda. The Chinese government managed to conclude two international treaties with global reach.

On November 15, 2021, at a ceremony hosted by Vietnam, 15 countries of the Asia-Pacific region signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), creating the world's largest trading group: China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.[99] Together, these countries account for 30% of the world's gross domestic product.

On December 30, 2021, the European Union and China concluded the negotiations for a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) with China committing to a greater level of market access for EU investors.[100] This happened despite even though the Biden transition team had communicated that it "would welcome early consultations with our

[96] Ibid.

[97] Cited by Ellyatt (2021).

[98] Global Times staff reporters (2021). See also Global Times Editorial (2021).

[99] Treaty text in: Australian Government (2020).

[100] Treaty text in: European Commission (2021).

European partners on our common concerns about China's economic practices."[101] Not least because of the timing, just weeks before the Biden inauguration, both agreements are significant geopolitical successes for Beijing. "As America churns division and internal strife, China's leaders are designing and executing an ascendance to power on a global scale not seen since the British Empire," as Jonathan Ward of the Center of New American Security put it in his book "China's Vision of Victory".[102]

12 Donald Trump, Catalyst for Global Shifts?

The Trump administration's record is devastating. American soft power, traditionally the main pillar to safeguard America's informal empire, melted down to near zero during the Trump presidency. With his unilateralism, Trump has geopolitically isolated the USA. The result was the opposite of what he wanted to achieve. His policy of "Make America Great Again" led to a drastic decline in foreign policy influence. Trump presided over the decline of the American empire. Trump's policy resulted in America's geopolitical isolation and the discrediting of American democracy. This has not stopped him from repeatedly claiming that under his administration America had once again become the dominant power in the world, a grotesque self-deception.

Notwithstanding this negative balance, it should be noted that Trump was the first president to understand America's decline not only as a temporary phenomenon, but instinctively to grasp the fundamental and long-term threat to the American empire from the rise of other powers and the existence of other empires. His objective of subordinating international relations to his unilateral and mercantilist principles has obviously failed. But Trump was the first president to make the fundamental challenges posed by the Chinese empire central to American domestic and foreign policy. It is very likely that the Sino-American confrontation will remain the dominant factor of the twenty-first century international system.

Many Americans seem to be tempted to interpret the Trump presidency as some kind of an accident, as an aberration from American democratic values and the American-led multilateral liberal world order. However, the election of Trump as President of the United States was not an accident. It was an expression of America's internal crisis and the failure of the traditional political and economic elites to balance social and economic exigencies with global leadership. Trump's foreign policy was a radical break with multilateralism, a destruction of the liberal world order and the end of the Pax Americana. However, this Pax Americana had already been on the decline prior to the advent of the Trump presidency. America's gradual retreat from global overcomitment was a result of domestic necessities and significant geopolitical shifts since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Even

[101] Sullivan (2020).

[102] Ward (2019: 22).

before the Trump presidency, American hegemony was challenged by China: politically, economically and strategically. The rise of China and the return of the jungle in international relations are not the result of Trump's policies alone. They also mark structural changes in the international system and the transition to a new world order. In this context, Henry Kissinger raised the question of whether Trump could be some kind of catalyst for global shifts: "I think Trump may be one of those figures in history who appears from time to time to mark the end of an era and to force it to give up its old pretences. It doesn't necessarily mean that he knows this, or that he is considering any great alternative. It could just be an accident."[103]

Some observers could not resist the temptation to refer to the philosopher Hegel and raise the question whether Donald Trump might be regarded as a "world-historical figure", a person who "embodies the spirit of our age". "Historic figures do not have to be good people, or even particularly intelligent," as the British Journalist Gideon Rachman has argued.[104] And he quotes France's state president Emmanuel Macron's definition of what Hegel meant by "world-historical figure": "Hegel viewed 'great men' as instruments of something far greater," Macron remarked in an interview. "He believed that an individual can indeed embody the zeitgeist (world spirit) for a moment, but also that the individual isn't always clear they are doing so." And Trump "may be the kind of instinctive statesmen that Hegel described," Rachman concludes, "a figure who has harnessed and embodied forces that he himself only half-understands."

Similarly, Trump can be seen as figure who, without being aware of it, confirmed the thesis of imperial overstretch and the resulting erosion of the American empire.

13 Paul Kennedy Vindicated

Kennedy's central thesis of imperial overstretch,[105] which the United States would not be able to avoid, has been repeatedly criticized, especially by American commentators. First of all, Kennedy's thesis was provocative because it challenged American exceptionalism and singularity. Samuel Huntington judged Kennedy's thesis as a wave of declinism that, like similar waves since the 1950s, would be short-lived. While he admitted that the United States "is not immortal" and that "American preeminence is not inevitable", he saw little reason "to assume that recent prophecies are more accurate than the earlier ones."[106]

The historical development seemed to confirm the critics. A few years after the publication of his book his judgment seemed to be premature. The Berlin Wall fell, Soviet

[103] Luce (2018).

[104] Rachman (2018).

[105] Kennedy (1988).

[106] Huntington (1988).

Union collapsed and the United States emerged as the undisputed sole superpower, the world's indispensable nation. Kennedy himself was overwhelmed by American global hegemony, and particularly by American military power. "the larger lesson," he wrote five months after the 9/11 terrorist attack, "and one stupefying to the Russian and Chinese military, worrying to the Indians and disturbing to proponents of a common European defense policy—is that in military terms there is only one player on the field that counts."[107]

Kennedy emphasized that "America's present standing rests upon a decade of impressive economic growth." But he cautioned for complacency: "[. . .] were that growth to swindle, and budgetary and fiscal problems to multiply over the next quarter of a century, then the threat of overstretch would return." Should that happen, then the world community would be facing "the possible collapse of US capacities and responsibilities and the chaos that might ensue from such a scenario."[108]

Eight years later, on the eve of the twenty-first century's second decade, Kennedy asked: "Is America really in decline?" He did not paint a picture of America's fall, but noted the relative loss of American power in the international System. In fact, this also meant a weakening of the American empire, although Kennedy did not make any explicit reference to the American empire. "All that is happening", he argued, "really is that the United States is slowly and naturally losing its abnormal status in the international system" with the United States just "being one of the most prominent player in the small club of great powers." That wouldn't mean America becoming a "flawed and impotent giant." Instead "things are just coming back to normal."[109]

But what is normal? Kennedy did not see this as a static fixation of America's role in world affairs, but rather as an intermediate stage in the long-term American development. This is shown by his critical reference to Harvard political scientist Joseph S. Nye,[110] who had made the point that America's unchallenged place in the world was like, as Kennedy put it, a "sturdy three-legged stool:" soft power, economic and military power.[111] Kennedy argued that all three elements had already lost their strength. He also emphasized the rise of other states such as China "that are pushing into America's post-1945 geopolitical space." All of these factors pointed to America's decline in the long run. This happened much faster than even Kennedy had anticipated. The 2010s became a decade of American decline. This is especially true for the years of the Trump administration. Trump became, to a certain extent the executor of Kennedy's theses. This applies above all to the meltdown of soft

[107] Kennedy (2002).
[108] Ibid.
[109] Kennedy (2010).
[110] Nye (1990).
[111] Kennedy (2010).

power. "Soft power comes and goes very fast," Kennedy wrote.[112] It is an irony that Kennedy's "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers" appeared along with Trump's book "Trump. The Art of the Deal" on the New York Times non-fiction best-seller list at the same day (3 April 1988); Trump in first, Kennedy in second place.

14 "To Win the Twenty-first Century": President Biden's Quest for Imperial Global Hegemony

14.1 Biden's Foreign Policy Agenda

After four chaotic years of the Trump administration, the Biden administration faced fundamental challenges in the fields of both domestic and foreign policy. Former secretary of state Madeleine Albright, author of the book "Fascism. A Warning",[113] had summarized the new president's foreign policy challenges prior to the 2020 presidential election:

"Certainly, the country cannot undo the experience of being represented by Mr Trump. Just as a herd of elephants leaves behind traces of its passage, so will the Trump team. Mr Biden, if elected, will inherit a country diminished by his predecessor's search for 'greatness' in all the wrong places. The new president's task will be daunting: to reassure allies; reassert leadership on climate change and world health; forge effective coalitions to check the ambitions of China, Russia and Iran; and re-establish the US's identity as a champion of democracy."[114]

Given these challenges and America's apparent decline, two key questions arise in this context. Will the US push to revive the liberal international order? Is there a possibility of restoring the American empire as the dominant power in the world? Apparently, President Biden is determined to answer both questions in the affirmative.

During the election campaign, Biden had repeatedly presented his foreign policy agenda. In his Foreign Affairs article, published in March 2020, he had unequivocally formulated America's quest for global leadership.[115] As president he would "take immediate steps to renew U.S. democracy and alliances, protect the United States' economic future and once more have America lead the world." He justified his quest for global leadership with reference to the post Second World War era. "This is the time to tap the strength and audacity that took us to victory in two world wars and brought down the Iron Curtain." He cited the "triumph of democracy and liberalism over fascism and autocracy" that had created the free world.[116]

[112] Kennedy (2010).

[113] Albright and Woodward (2018).

[114] Albright (2020).

[115] Biden (2020a).

[116] Biden (2020a: 65).

"For 70 years, the United States, under Democratic and Republican presidents, played a leading role in writing the rules, forging the agreements, and animating the institutions that guide relations among nations and advance collective security and prosperity—until Trump. If we continue his abdication of that responsibility, then one of two things will happen: either someone else will take the United States' place, but not in a way that advances our interests and values, or no-one will, and chaos will ensue. Either way, that's not good for America."[117]

Biden promised "to prove to the world that the United States is prepared to lead again—not just with the example of our power but also with the power of our example." As president he would take "decisive steps to renew our core values."[118] And Biden left no doubt that he claimed a dominant role for the United States in world affairs, placing the United States "back at the head of the table, in a position to work with its allies and partners to mobilize collective action on global threats."[119]

Shortly after the election, Biden repeated this postulate, when he announced key members of his foreign policy and national security team: "I need a team ready on Day One to help me reclaim America's seat at the head of the table."[120]

In his inaugural address Biden also had a "message to those beyond our borders." The president promised to "repair our alliances and engage with the world once again" to meet today's and tomorrow's challenges. "And we'll lead not merely by the example of our power, but by the power of our example." America "will be a strong and trusted partner for peace, progress, and security."[121] In his first foreign policy speech as president Biden wanted "the world to hear today: America is back. America is back. Diplomacy is back at the center of foreign policy." The formula "America is back," repeatedly used by the president over the following weeks, also embodies Washington's claim for global leadership.[122] The president apparently wants to give credibility to this announcement of resolute leadership in the world and his claim to global predominance by demonstrating an equally resolute domestic policy.

In his first address to Congress, Biden affirmed America's claim to global leadership. He formulated his claim even more pointedly than in previous statements. His goal is to establish the United States as number one in the twenty-first century international system: "We're in competition with China and other countries to win the 21st Century."[123]

[117] Biden (2020a: 71).
[118] Biden (2020a: 65).
[119] Biden (2020a: 71).
[120] Biden 2020b).
[121] Biden (2021a).
[122] Biden (2021b, d).
[123] Biden (2021g).

14.2 Foreign Policy Begins at Home

In the presentations of his foreign policy agenda, Biden had repeatedly stressed the close interdependence of foreign policy and domestic necessities. "Foreign policy for the middle class," as Biden put it. Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security advisor, is an outspoken exponent for this focus on the domestic driving forces of American foreign policy. This is documented in Sullivan's numerous statements before and after the president's inauguration. On 4 February 2021 he stated in a press briefing: "Everything we do in our foreign policy and national security will be measured by a basic metric: Is it going to make life better, safer, and easier for working families?"[124] He explained that this meant "a different approach to trade policy. We're not trying to make the world safe for multilateral investment, we're creating jobs and raising wages here in the United States." Therefore "our priority is not to get access for Goldman Sachs in China", but to make sure "that we are dealing with China's trade abuses that are harming American jobs and American workers in the United States." For secretary of state Antony Blinken "distinctions between domestic and foreign policy have simply fallen away," he said in a speech on American foreign policy in March 2021. "Our domestic renewal and our strength in the world are completely intertwined."[125]

Central element of domestic renewal is Biden's multitrillion-dollar economic agenda: the 1.9 trillion COVID19 relief bill, the 2.3 trillion-dollar infrastructure bill and the 1.8 trillion American Families Plan to expand the social safety net. Historians and political commentators are already comparing Biden's bold economic and social programs with Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s or Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society of the mid-1960s. Like Roosevelt, President Biden seeks to transform the American economic and social system. Biden's foreign policy seems to be less innovative. As far as we can see now, his foreign policy stands in the tradition of American hegemony. The question arises as to whether the Biden administration will be able to bridge the tension between Weltpolitik and domestic necessities or whether there is a risk of imperial overstretch. Washington's China policy and the further development of the Sino-American tension should give an answer.

15 The Sino-American Confrontation

15.1 What Kind of World Order?

Joe Biden's election was received with relief around the world. American allies and opponents hoped for an end of Trump's sledgehammer "diplomacy". As to Trump's aggressive economic sanctions policy, it was particularly the Chinese government that

[124] White House (2021).

[125] Blinken (2021a).

saw a possibility of normalizing US-Chinese trade relations. "With changing dynamics," hopes were mounting in Beijing that the two countries "could find ways to manage, if not resolve, their differences and press the 'reset' button on the relationship." And if the "relationship cannot be reset entirely," trade was seen as a field of cooperation."[126]

However, Beijing had to quickly realize that expectations of a bilateral détente would not materialize. Biden's China policy differs from his predecessor's approach only in style; in substance it is more of a continuation of Trump's confrontational policy. In a telephone conversation with the Chinese president Xi Jinping President Biden "affirmed his priorities of protecting the American people's security, prosperity, health, and way of life, and preserving a free an open Indo-Pacific." President Biden also voiced his "fundamental concerns" about China's "coercive and unfair economic practices", the Chinese crackdown in Hong Kong, human rights abuse in Xinjiang, and "increasingly assertive actions" toward Taiwan. Results-oriented cooperation would be possible insofar as it is in the interests of the American people and America's allies.[127] In his telephone conversation with President Xi, Biden also set the tone for future American-Chinese talks. The first high-level US--China discussions during the Biden presidency took place in March in Anchorage, Alaska. Participants of the two plus two meeting were: U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, National Security adviser Jake Sullivan, Chinese Politburo member and Director of the Chinese Politburo's Office of the Central Commission of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. From the outset the two delegations confronted each other in an undiplomatic language. The opening statements, at which the press was present, were characterized by unusually blunt words.[128]

Secretary of state Blinken let the Chinese know that the Biden administration is committed to leading with diplomacy to advance the interests of the United States and to strengthen the rules-based international order, a system that should not be regarded as an "abstraction," since it "helps countries resolve differences peacefully, coordinate multilateral efforts effectively and participate in global commerce." The alternative to this rules-based order "is a world in which might makes right and winners take all, and that would be a far more violent and unstable world for all of us." In this context Blinken considered the rules-based order to be threatened by various actions by China "including in Xinjang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, cyberattacks on the United States and economic coercion toward America's allies. Because of their international implications these actions were "not merely internal matters."

The Chinese counterparts left no doubt that China is striving for an international order that is fundamentally different from the American concept of world order. Chinese foreign minister Wang stressed Beijing's commitment to "the United Nations-centered international system and the international order underpinned by international law" in contrast to

[126] Wang and Li (2021).

[127] Biden (2021c).

[128] The following quotations in: Blinken (2021c).

what is advocated by "a small number of countries" of the "so-called rules-based international order." These different global systems should also be seen against the background of differing concepts of democracy, Wang argued.

"And the United States has its style—United States-style democracy—and China has the Chinese-style democracy. It is not just up to the American people, but also the people of the world, to evaluate how the United States has done in advancing its own democracy. In China's case, after decades of reform and opening up, we have come a long way in various fields. In particular, we have engaged in tireless efforts to contribute to the peace and development of the world, and to upholding the purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter."[129] In additional remarks Yang Jiechi, Director of the Office of the Central Commission of Foreign Affairs, assessed American values to be irrelevant for the world at large, because the U.S. "does not represent the world. It only represents the government of the United States." The overwhelming majority of countries in the world would not recognize that the "universal values advocated by the United States or that the opinion of the United States could represent international public opinion."

It is remarkable what great a role domestic issues played in these Sino-American conversations. Yang Jiechi referred to the economic and social progress made by China. He stressed "decisive achievements and important strategic gains in fighting COVID-19", the end of "absolute poverty for all people in China," and China's historic achievements in "building the country into a moderately prosperous one in all respects." Finally, Yang emphasized the political stability of the Chinese regime. "The Chinese people are wholly rallying around the Communist Party of China." And he claimed Chinese values to be "the same as the common values of humanity."

Yang further believed "that it is important for the United States to change its own image and to stop advancing its own democracy in the rest of the world." Yang claimed that even within the United States many people "actually have little confidence in the democracy of the United States" while the leaders of China—according to American opinion polls—"have the support of the Chinese people."

A week after the Alaska meeting, Biden reaffirmed at his first press conference in office Washington's demand that China must adhere to the rule-based international order on all issues. The US and its allies would "insist that China play by the international rules: fair competition, fair practices, fair trade." China would be hold accountable "to follow the rules—to follow the rules—whether it relates to the South China Sea or the North China Sea, or their agreement made on Taiwan, or a whole range of other things."[130]

Biden observed that he saw "stiff competition" with China and that he realized that China had "an overall goal to become the leading country" in the world, the "wealthiest country in the world and the most powerful country in the world." But the President left no

[129] Blinken (2021c).

[130] Biden (2021f).

doubt about his administration's resolve: "That's not going to happen on my watch because the United States are going to continue to grow and expand."

15.2 A New Cold War?

The intensifying Sino-American confrontation has been repeatedly referred to as some sort of New Cold War. In view of the increasing ideological confrontation, this seems plausible at first sight. However, there are differences when compared to the American-Soviet confrontation after World War II. To name just two. Compared to China, the Soviet Union was an economic dwarf. China's integration into the world economy is so advanced that it is virtually impossible to isolate it from the West, as it happened during the Cold War. And the economies of the United States and China are deeply integrated. Gideon Rachman, chief foreign affairs columnist for the Financial Times, characterizes the US and China as "integrated rivals." He points out that there are more Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants in China than in the United States. This economic intertwining had also "created a degree of social convergence," and even "strong scientific and educational ties" between the two countries, he argues. "Mr Xi's daughter was educated at Harvard. Stalin's daughter was not sent to Yale.[131]

The Biden administration is well aware of the resulting complexity for Sino-American relations. Katherine Tai, President Biden's nominee for U.S. trade representative, succinctly summed up this complexity of Sino-American relations." China is simultaneously a rival, a trade partner and an outsized player whose cooperation will also need to address certain global challenges," she said in the opening statement at her confirmation hearing before the Senate Finance Committee. "We must remember how to walk, chew gum and play chess at the same time."[132] And as secretary of state Blinken put it: "Our relationship with China will be competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, and adversarial when it must be."[133]

15.3 American Imperial Overstretch?

In the initial phase of Biden's China policy, the competitive and adverse elements apparently dominate. This can be seen, for example, in Biden's focus on security alliances and military preparedness as stated in the president's Interim National Security Strategy Guidance.[134] It is certainly no coincidence that in the context of the US-Chinese

[131] Rachman (2020).
[132] Tai (2021).
[133] Blinken (2021b).
[134] Biden (2021e).

confrontation, American military plans for the Pacific and Indian Oceans are increasingly finding their way into the international press. Just a few examples: on 5 March 2021 the daily Nikkei Asia published a reported on plans to build a missile network along the so-called fist island chain, which consists of a group of islands including Taiwan, Okinawa and the Philippines. This projected build-up seeks to strengthen the conventional deterrence to counteract China's strategy "to push American forces out of he East and South China seas within the first island chain.[135] Two days later James Stavridis, a former Supreme Allied Commander of NATO and author of the novel "2034: A Novel of the Next World War," published an article on US military preparations for a war with China.[136] On 12 March 2021 Nikkei Asia reported on new strategic thinking for a military confrontation with China.[137]

President Biden has repeatedly emphasized that preserving "a free and open Indo-Pacific" is one of his top priorities. However, this focus on the Indo-Pacific and the military build-up in the region run the risk of imperial overstretch. Van Jackson, Professor of International Relations at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand, even referred to the new American commitments in the Indo-Pacific as "America's Indo-Pacific Folly." The concept of an Indo-Pacific, he argued, "what is meant by Asia to include the Indian Ocean region, an area of debatable interest that many now see as vital for countering China." However, widening the "regional aperture in this manner encourages military overstretch by positioning the United States for commitments that will be difficult to defend." Policymaker's would be distracted from other parts of Asia, "where decades of hard-won peace hinge much more directly on American words and deeds." East Asia and the Pacific "are not just subsets" of a greater Indo-Pacific. They "are the core geography of U.S. power and influence in Asia. Forsaking them for the latest geopolitical buzzword is an epic blunder in the making." Jackson described the Indo-Pacific as "an imagined sphere of U.S, interests." Putting the Indian Ocean on par with East Asia "could lead to disaster."[138]

In the context of the Sino-American confrontation, however, it is not only the United States that is risking imperial overstretch. China's foreign policy is also at risk of imperial overstretch.

15.4 Chinese Imperial Overstretch?

During the pandemic president Xi undertook various steps to expand China's global influence. He opened numerous fronts. From Hong Kong and Taiwan to the South and East China Sees and to the border with India he pursued an aggressive policy. As it turns

[135] Nakamura (2021).

[136] Stavridris (2021).

[137] Khan, Wajahat (2021).

[138] Jackson (2021).

out, this policy poses significant challenges for Beijing. Referring to the work of Paul Kennedy, the geostrategist and author Brahma Chellaney noted in June 2020 that President Xi's "expansive vision has also increased the risks of China" becoming victim of imperial overstretch, or-"overextending itself abroad, leading to its decline and fall, like how the Soviet empire imploded."[139]

Clear indication of China's imperial overstretch are recent European reactions to President Xi's hard-line diplomacy. On May 20 2021, The European Parliament froze the ratification process of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, a deal that Beijing had hailed as a great strategic victory on its conclusion in November 2020. "It has sent shock waves throughout China," as Katsuji Nakazawa, a Nikkei Asia staff writer, observed. "with only one month and change before arguably the most important event in President Xi Jinping's era, the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party's establishment, on July 1." Obviously some party members "are worried that the centenary's festive mood will be damped by the harsh diplomatic reality."[140]

Beijing imperial policy suffered another setback, when Lithuania decided on 22 May 2021 to leave the 17 + 1 framework between China and 17 central and east European states. Beijing's only response was to intensify its 'wolf warrior diplomacy." Lithuania "will pay a high price for this in the long run," the Global Times wrote. "It wants to become an anti-China vanguard, but will likely end up being a cannon fodder."[141] It has been argued that the overassertive "wolf warrior diplomacy" could prove to be an element of imperial overstretch with negative effects on domestic politics. "For China, the risks of current drift are immense," wrote Sulmaan Khan, Professor of International Relations and Chinese Foreign Relations at Tufts Universiy. "The real danger is that once toxin has spread through the system, there is no knowing where it will end."[142] Apparently President Xi wanted to respond to this challenge, when he recently called on Chinese officials to create a "trustworthy, lovable and respectable" national image. He added that China should "be open and confident, but also modest and humble."[143]

16 A "Totally New Era"?

With the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the problem of imperial overstretch has taken on new dimensions. What does the Russian invasion that began on 24 February 2022 mean for Biden's quest for global leadership and ultimately for the future of the American empire?

[139] Chellaney (2020).

[140] Nakazawa (2021).

[141] Global Times Opinion and Viewpoint (2021).

[142] Khan, Sulmaan Wasif (2021).

[143] As cited by Taylor (2021).

The very fact that President Putin dared to attack Ukraine can be seen as an indicator of the state of the American empire. As mentioned above, the storming of the American Congress on 6 January 2021 had put America's decline on display for the world at large. In August 2021 Biden's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan further damaged US global prestige; the President's call for an end of "forever wars" seemed to signal US military restraint. And in December 2022 Biden had ruled out sending US troops to Ukraine to defend the country from a Russian invasion.

These factors may have contributed to a fundamental misjudgment of the American factor by the Russian leadership. Apparently, in pursuit of his imperial ambitions, President Putin had succumbed to the illusion that he could occupy Ukraine in a Hitler-like blitzkrieg without serious resistance from the West. As we know Putin overestimated Russia's military capabilities and he also miscalculated the situation he faced internationally.

The Western disunity that Putin expected turned out to be an illusion. In response to Russian aggression transatlantic relations were revitalized and NATO was strengthened. Steps were taken to expand NATO with Finland and Sweden applying for membership. President Biden emerged as the undisputed leader of the free world and the guarantor of European security.

The question arises as to whether the Russian aggression could also be seen in a larger historical context: The revival of historically legitimated imperial thought as well as action. Empires that fell victim to the two world wars in the twentieth century appear to be striving for a renaissance in the twenty-first century, albeit in different ways. Fallen empires try to reanimate their past empires: The British government floated the idea of "Global Britain" and French President Macron wants to revitalize relations with former colonies. The Turkish President Erdogan is also driven by empire nostalgia in his policy of Neo-Ottomanism. And the Chinese leadership sees its political 'mission' at home and abroad in the tradition of its 5000 years of history and its contribution to world civilization. China's rise since the end of the twentieth century is understood as the great "rejuvenation." The most extreme form of empire reconstruction is currently the Russian warfare in Ukraine. Putin compares himself to Tsar Peter the Great to justify his brutal occupation of a sovereign state to "take back" Russian land. Putin's war of aggression unleashed a global energy crisis that is already dramatically changing the global geopolitical landscape.

Referring to the Ukraine war, geopolitical shifts, and current geopolitical challenges, Henry Kissinger concluded "that we are living in a totally new era." In an interview with the Financial Times on 24 May 2022 he also drew attention to the dynamics of technological change: "We are now [faced] with technologies where the rapidity of exchange, the subtlety of the inventions, can produce levels of catastrophe that were not even imaginable. And the strange aspect of the present situation is that the weapons are multiplying on both sides and their sophistication is increasing every year." As to American foreign policy, Kissinger, architect of the 1972 US-China rapprochement, expressed particular concern on Russian-Chinese cooperation. Kissinger didn't use the term "imperial overstretch," but that's what he obviously had in mind when he pointed out that "it is unwise to take an adversarial position to two adversaries in a way that drives them together."

The US is currently facing exactly this double threat. China and Russia are attacking the rules-based international order. And the Ukraine war shows in a dramatic way that these authoritarian powers want to change the status quo also by military means. President Biden seeks to counter these threats by revitalizing American alliances in Europe and Asia. The credibility of his alliance policy will largely depend on the outcome of the Ukraine war. Will Taiwan become the next Ukraine?

As to the question of the sustainability of America's leadership, President Biden impressively demonstrated that even a divided America can still lead the West. However, for the US allies the question arises as to whether the American voter is prepared to accept the burden of imperial overstretch in the future. After all, a figure like Donald Trump successfully campaigned against America's imperial overstretch in 2016. He won the presidency. With his unilateral foreign policy, he destructed central elements of the liberal international order. With his commitment to this liberal world order, President Biden has renewed America's claim to global leadership. However, the long shadow of Trumpism still haunts American allies. The development of American democracy will determine not only the future of the American empire but also the future of the West.

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